The Wingless Victory

by

Maxwell Anderson

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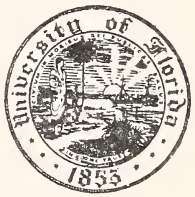
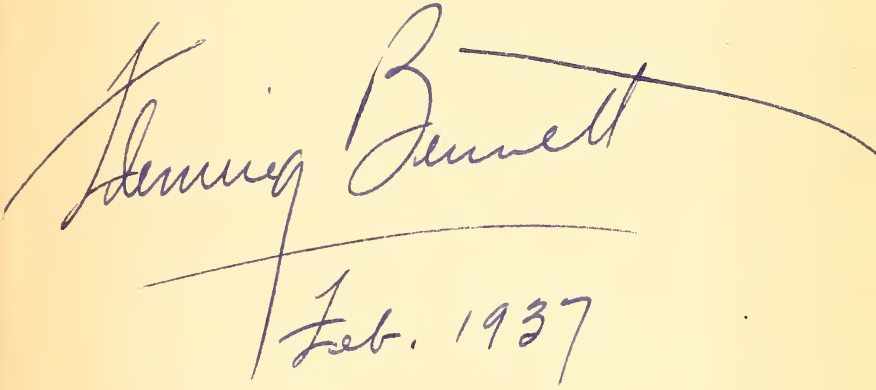


The Gift of

Fleming Bennett


Feb. 1937

THE WINGLESS VICTORY

The
WINGLESS VICTORY

A Play in Three Acts

By

MAXWELL ANDERSON

ANDERSON HOUSE
Washington, D.C.
1936

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NOTE

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FIRST EDITION

GEORGE BANTA PUBLISHING COMPANY, MENASHA, WISCONSIN

THE WINGLESS VICTORY had its first performance on any stage in the National Theatre, Washington, D.C., on Tuesday night, November 24, 1936, when the drama was produced by Katharine Cornell, with this cast:

A GIRL	*Mary Michael*
THE REVEREND PHINEAS MCQUESTON	*Kent Smith*
JARED MUNGO	*Arthur Chatterton*
WINSTON URQUHART	*John Winthrop*
MRS. MCQUESTON	*Effie Shannon*
RUEL MCQUESTON	*Myron McCormick*
VENTURE	*Lois Jameson*
FAITH INGALLS	*Ruth Matteson*
HAPPY PENNY	*Barry Kelly*
LETTY	*Theodora Pleadwell*
NATHANIEL MCQUESTON	*Walter Abel*
OPARRE	*Katharine Cornell*
TOALA	*Helen Zelinskaya*
DURIAN	*Claire Howard*
HARRY, A BAILIFF	*Arthur Chatterton*
VAN ZANDT, A SAILOR	*Victor Colton*

Staged by Guthrie McClintic
Settings and costumes by Jo Mielziner

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THE WINGLESS VICTORY

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The living room of a house in Salem, early in the winter of 1800. The place is well, if somewhat sternly furnished, giving evidence of wealth and an eye for design. Over the fireplace a magnificent ship model takes the center of the stage, flanked by two rather restrained religious pictures. There are doors to right and left and a window which looks out over the harbor. The right-hand door leads to the kitchen, the left-hand door to a front hall and stairway. It is evening and the room is just now the scene of an ecclesiastical session. The* REVEREND PHINEAS MCQUESTON *stands near the fireplace speaking to a* GIRL *with a* BABE *in her arms and a shawl over her head who stands near the door.* JARED MUNGO *and* WINSTON URQUHART, *elders of the church, are seated facing the* GIRL. MRS. MCQUESTON, *mother of the minister and lady of the house, sits near the fire, her knitting laid in her lap as she listens.*

Phineas. If you had been willing to name this man, sinner with you and equally guilty, we should have been willing, according to our custom, to call you both before the congregation, there to receive castigation fitting your desert and thereafter, the penalties of your guilt borne uncomplainingly, to be readmitted to the body of the church. But you, recalcitrant girl as you are, bring on yourself a heavier verdict through silence. Your case has been considered by the elders of the vestry, and you are to be thrust out from the congregation, neither is there to be entertainment vouchsafed you by communicants. You have chosen your

place with whoremasters and whalers of the waterfront. You are free to go to that place.

The Girl.

[*Looking up*]

I am free?

Phineas. You are free to seek your own place, for the old will know you no more.

The Girl. Oh, sir; oh, sir—he will die!

Mungo. You were given a choice. It's still not too late.

The Girl. I can't tell that! Truly I can't tell it!

Mungo. You know his name. You have but to say his name.

The Girl. But if I were to say it—forgive me—you would be sorrier than I!

Phineas.

[*Thundering*]

We know no exceptions and no favorites here!

Urquhart. If the lass wishes to keep her mouth shut let her keep it shut then. We've no call to drag down a respected citizen along with her.

Phineas. Guilt is guilt and calls for punishment!

Urquhart. She's willing to take it alone. Let her take it.

The Girl. But if you cast me out—if the congregation casts me out—me and the babe—we'll have no place

to go. He'll die—there'll not be a crust—and I've had little enough for him where I am—

Phineas. I've spoken to your master and mistress. You'll find it useless to return there.

The Girl. Please, sirs—he's but a bairn and it wasn't his fault. Oh, please, sirs—you couldn't want him to die—

Phineas. We can make no distinction between the sin and the fruits of the sin. It would be as well if he were to die—and better for your soul.

The Girl. Oh, God forgive you, God forgive you—

Mungo. Ask your own forgiveness, woman! You're the one needs it!

The Girl.

[*Timidly*]

Mrs. McQueston—

Mrs. McQueston. I've no part in this.

[*The right-hand door opens and* RUEL MCQUESTON *enters. He pauses.*]

The Girl. But you know how it is when you have a babe and love him, Mrs. McQueston. I've had plenty to bear with him, but I love him. Couldn't you speak to your son, couldn't you ask him—just to let us live—

Mrs. McQueston.

[*Rising deliberately and going to the* GIRL]

Go out! You've heard what was said to you here! Go out. And go far from us.

[*The* GIRL *pauses.* MRS. MCQUESTON *spits in her face. The* GIRL *turns, wiping off the spittle with the shawl that is wrapped round the child, and goes to the door, fumbling blindly for the handle.* RUEL *crosses the room, opens the door for her, lets her out and faces the company.*]

Ruel. Sorry to intrude, I'm sure.

[MRS. MCQUESTON *returns toward the chair.*]

Phineas. She could have opened the door for herself.

Ruel. Just one of those niceties the cloth could never comprehend, brother. A gentleman opens a door for a lady in distress.

[*He goes to the fire.*]

Phineas. A lady, brother?

Ruel. Do you mean to tell me that in all those rules of the church there's nothing said, absolutely nothing, about common courtesy?—Besides she's a quite personable wench, and I have no doubt a most obliging armful.

Phineas. If you have occasion to use this room we can remove our session.

Ruel. I do have occasion to use the room, God defend me. I came in to get warm—there being no coal fire elsewhere. The family fortunes have fallen so low, gentlemen, that we keep but one fire, and on session days, while you confer so snugly here over the black destinies of man, the rest of the family must needs

huddle in the kitchen. I'm loath to speak of this, as it may hurry your already hasty decisions, but my proximity to the kitchen maids tends to undermine their morals. It follows that the more you build up morality in the parlor the more I tear it down below stairs, a regrettable cancellation.

Mungo. We were about to leave, Reverend Phineas.

Mrs. McQueston. Ruel!

Ruel. Yes, mother.

Mrs. McQueston. You've said enough, and you can go.

Ruel. Back to the kitchen, mother?

Mrs. McQueston. You've dishonored us in every tavern on the harbor. Be content with that. I may have hatched a devil, for you speak like one, but in this house I'm mistress and you'll give at least lip service to the things of God!

Ruel. Mother, mother, to make me out a devil you make yourself the devil's dam, which is something of a stain to my progenitors—

Phineas. Must you be taught respect to our mother—you wastrel?

[*He bustles up to* RUEL, *who is amused.*]

Ruel. Come, come, little Phineas. You're at a disadvantage, both in your shoulders and your epithets. However, I'll leave if my errand's unwelcome. I came to tell you news of brother Nat.

Mrs. McQueston. What news?

Ruel. I may stay then? Thanks. Why, it seems you were right in what you heard from New Bedford. Brother Nat is back, he's captain and owner of a five-master, and the damn thing's loaded to the gunnels with spices from the Celebes.

[*To* MUNGO *and* URQUHART]

Excuse the language, but our hope is, gentlemen, that brother Nat is returning rich to restore the fading fortunes of our somewhat seedy family. He was treated a bit cavalierly on his exit, being at that time a vagabond sailor, but something tells me he will be received with intoxicating warmth—

Phineas. We can discuss the family fortunes in private—

Ruel. Oh, yes! we will.

Mrs. McQueston. Where did you hear this?

Ruel. You can see the lights of a coasting lugger from the window. When she came in I recognized the *Silver Pennant* of New Bedford. The second mate is a friend of mine, Mr. Happy Penny—I assure you the name's no fiction, though his christened monicker being Merriment Penny we call him Happy for short. Mr. Penny had seen Captain Nathaniel, our distinguished brother, and spoken to him. It's true as Gospel, and perhaps even more reliable, that Nat is rich, healthy and bound for home. He had put into New Bedford only to refit after a storm and is on his way here now. Does this earn me a place among the blest?

Mungo. Mrs. McQueston, I congratulate you.

Urquhart. It's not often a prodigal returns better off than he went.

Mungo. How long has he been away?

Mrs. McQueston. Seven years. Seven years without a word.

Ruel. And seven lean years at that.

Phineas. He's an evil man. Rich or poor, brother or not, he's evil,

Ruel. But you'll forgive him, Phineas, you'll forgive him. Oh, you'll forgive more than you know.

Phineas. And what do you mean by that?

Ruel. Oh, there's a latter end to my story. It has a sting in the tail. I shall retain this sequel until the visitors leave.

Urquhart. Why—in that case—

Mungo. Yes—we shall say good night, Reverend Phineas.

Ruel. Oh, no hurry—the suspense is good for us all.

Phineas. Brother Ruel is not the spokesman for our family, gentlemen. I hope you will disregard his dismissal.

Urquhart. No more words, sir, no more words. You have important matters in hand, and we're off. Bring the

prodigal round to mid-week prayers, Mrs. McQueston. He'll need a little praying after seven years at sea.

[*He takes her hand.*]

Mrs. McQueston. Thank you. I will.

Urquhart. And good night, sir.

Phineas. Good night, then—since you wish it.

Mungo. Good night. We can find the door.

Mrs. McQueston. Good night.

[MUNGO *and* URQUHART *go out.*]

Ruel. Draw as long a face as you can, dominie—it'll grow longer while I talk.

Mrs. McQueston. Will you put an end to this, and say out what you have to say?

Ruel. Indeed I will, mother, and enjoy it. I sat over a glass with Mr. Happy Penny and he furnished me with further details of the arrival. Details of a most scandalous sort. Oh, this world, this world! To what depths of degradation may a wandering sailor be carried by his passions! Brother Nathaniel brings two women with him in the after cabins.

Mrs. McQueston. What sort of women?

Ruel. What sort? Well, to tell the truth, they're black.

Mrs. McQueston. Black?

[RUEL *bows.*]

Slaves?

Ruel. Well, the story runs he's married to one or both of them, though on this point Mr. Penny left me dark, being a timid man in family affairs and not liking to put embarrassing questions to Nathaniel.

Phineas. He's married to black women?

Ruel. Now perhaps only to one, and to defend our brother's taste for the moment, perhaps only to the younger and lighter-skinned of the two.

Phineas. Where do these women come from?

Ruel. I don't know. I have only the most alarming suspicions.

Phineas. How long have they been with him?

Ruel. I fear it's not an affair of the moment. There are two children.

Mrs. McQueston. Children!

Ruel. Two children.

Mrs. McQueston. Black children!

Ruel. Well, not black. Shall we say a faint coffee-color?

Phineas. This is an invention—a hoax you perpetrate on us for your own amusement. "Shall we say a faint coffee-color." Faugh!

Ruel. At least it is amusing to speculate. I admit I haven't seen them with my own eyes, and the whole affair may be exaggerated.

Phineas. I rather think so. And I wonder at my weak-

ness of brain in being taken in by you. I'm not usually so open a target.

Ruel. No, Phineas, you're not.

Mrs. McQueston. This was all a fabrication then?

Ruel. Madam, I own I've sometimes permitted my fancy to run away with me in the presence of Phineas. Brother or not, this Phineas is a consummate half-wit, and it's a temptation to lead him on. But in this case I leave all to the great fabricator himself, and scorn to embroider on his matchless doings. I have seen things, madam, in my circumscribed travels, which would lead me to believe anything, quite anything, of the great author of all and what he allows. I say this seriously, madam, speaking though I do to those who cannot understand me.

Phineas. I'll believe none of your preposterous nonsense!

Ruel. It's seldom necessary to encourage a fool in his folly.

Mrs. McQueston.

[*Coming up to* RUEL]

And do you quote that saying to Phineas? You who grew up a mocker in a godly town and a godly household, you who spent more than your share when there was plenty, and bring nothing but grief into the house now we're poor! A friend of rogues and fornicator with street women! A follower of Paris fashions who's

never gone out to earn what would buy him a shirt! The shirt you wear was bought by this same brother of yours, who has used his wits to far better advantage for all your fine sayings!

Ruel. All that's quite true. When I was young there was too much money in the house to be good for me, and now that I need it I've an aversion toward going out to get it. Quite true.

Mrs. McQueston. Then keep silent when your brother speaks, out of mere decency!

Ruel. Silent I am, silent I shall be.

Mrs. McQueston. Yes, till you need a shilling. Then you'll speak fast enough.

Ruel. Possession, possession, ah, it's possession makes a man.

Mrs. McQueston. Then you're none.

Ruel. Then I'm none, as you say.

[*He turns out a pocket ruefully. The inner door opens and* VENTURE MCQUESTON, *wife of* PHINEAS, *looks in, followed by* FAITH INGALLS.]

Venture. Phineas!

Phineas. Yes?

Venture. May we come in?

Phineas. Yes. What is it?

Venture. Haven't you heard?

Phineas. Heard? No.

Venture. But here's cousin Faith
and she says Nathaniel's coming!

Phineas. Yes, my dear,
but we've heard that.

Faith. But coming now—this moment—
look out the window—there's a ship warping in
with a star on every masthead—count the lanterns!—
she's a five-master! The whole town's running down
to the harbor front, and everyone I've seen
says it's the *Queen of the Celebes!*

[*They look out.*]

Phineas. And by
what process of divination can they read
her name at night?

Faith. And who but Captain Nat
would run the shoals in the dark? By the cut of his jib
and his dashing ways you shall know him, cousin Phineas,
and know him I do!

Phineas. Could it be?

Ruel. If he made a quick run
he could be here, yes.

Phineas. It's like him to waste sperm oil
at every masthead.

Faith. Waste it! Now let's allow

one celebration in seven years. He's coming
straight in. He'll dock at your wharf below.

Phineas. He's welcome
to the berth. It's empty.

Ruel. And has been for some time—
and would be?

Phineas. Oh, and would be.

Faith. He said when he left
he'd never cross that bar again till he
could buy the town for cash.

Mrs. McQueston. Have you heard from him
in all this time, my dear?

Faith. Once, only once.
Do I sound possessive? He's forgotten me,
as the fish forgets the hook, only remembering
the cicatrice in his lip.

Mrs. McQueston. I very much fear
he's forgotten all of us.

Faith. What would make you think so?
Isn't he here?

Phineas. He comes to dazzle us,
but he'll go his own way, I doubt, and quite as well
so far as I'm concerned.

Faith. I believe you credit
that absurd story about the blackamoor
he's supposed to have married.

Phineas. No.

Faith. No. I should hope not.
He was nobody's fool. Look, look how they run—
you'd think it was the second coming.

Ruel. Well, in some ways
it was less expected.

Faith. Shall we be on the pier
when he disembarks? Come.

Phineas. If he wants to see us
we shall be here.

Faith. Now, please—if he wants to see you—
Who else would he care to see?

Phineas. I'll make no part
of his triumph!

Faith. But aren't you glad that he's come back—
and glad that he's rich?

Phineas. I shall be more concerned
about the state of his soul. There are better things
in this world than money.

Faith. Oh, not in this world, cousin.
The other world.

Phineas. No, this.

Faith. Oh, but that's tiresome,
really it is, at this moment. Come with me, please,
all of us. Here's a brother of yours returning,

the giddiest, maddest tar that ever followed
the whistling of a wind—and damned his eyes
if he cared where he went—and in he blows
with a fortune reaped on the outlands of the moon
somewhere, anywhere—went out with half a florin
to bless himself, and back now a merchant prince
with gold he coined in a sunset! I may have loved him
once, but so did you I should think, at least
enough to bid him welcome.

Phineas. He'll be happier
if I'm not there with my long face and black coat
to make my comment.

Faith. Ruel?

Ruel. Oh, I'll be along.

Venture. Could I go, Phineas?

Phineas. If it's compatible
that you should walk the road and cling to the palings
with a mob at your heels.

Venture. I'm sorry.

Ruel. They're warping in
at the foot of the street. They'll have the gangplank down
before we get there.

Faith. Quick, then.

[*A flash lights the room.*]

Ruel. I think they're burning

Greek fire on the point.

[*He turns toward the door.*]

Heigh-ho! Well, anyway
somebody's ship came in!

[RUEL *and* FAITH *go out the outer door.* VENTURE *still stands at the window.*]

Phineas. I wish to speak
with my mother, Venture.

Venture. Yes, Phineas.

[*She goes within.*]

Phineas. The ways
of God are strange. The sinner always triumphant;
the babbler and the reveller sit at meat,
while those who serve Him hope for a dinner of herbs
and rise up hungry. It's too much to ask
that I beg of Nathaniel!

Mrs. McQueston. How are we off without him?

Phineas. There's nothing left. You'll lose the house and the wharf
if it goes much longer.

Mrs. McQueston. He'll not let that happen,
now that he's here.

Phineas. Do you bargain with him then!
It's out of my hands.

[LETTY, *a servant, comes to the inner door.*]

Letty. Madam, there's an officer came to the kitchen door, a Mr. Penny, looking for Mr. Ruel.

Phineas. That will be this Happy Penny then.—Mr. Ruel's gone out.

Letty. I'll tell him. Thank you, sir.

Mrs. McQueston. Ask Mr. Penny if he'll step in a moment. I'd like to see him.

Letty. Yes, madam.

[*She goes in.*]

Mrs. McQueston. He's seen these women of Nathaniel's.

[*She sits.*]

Phineas. I'd rather trade no gossip.

Mrs. McQueston. Listen then, and benefit by it.

[*The door opens and* HAPPY PENNY, *an open-faced young seaman, is ushered in.*]

Happy. Good evening, ma'am. Good evening, sir.

[PHINEAS *bows.*]

Mrs. McQueston. Is this Mr. Happy Penny?

Happy. Yes, Mrs. McQueston.

Mrs. McQueston. This is my son, the Reverend Phineas McQueston.

Happy. Pleased to meet you, sir.

Phineas. And you.

Mrs. McQueston. I'll come straight to the point, Mr. Penny. I'm told you saw my son Nathaniel at New Bedford.

Happy. Yes, ma'am. I did. Aboard the *Queen of the Celebes.* Which is now in below.

Mrs. McQueston. I have heard that he's married. Is that true?

Happy. Now as to that I couldn't say.

Mrs. McQueston. There were two women on board, I hear?

Happy. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. McQueston. And two children?

Happy. Yes. One of the women was, I should say, a nurse like.

Mrs. McQueston. A black woman?

Happy. Not to say black, no.

Mrs. McQueston. Not of our race?

Happy. No, ma'am.

Mrs. McQueston. Neither of them?

Happy. No, ma'am.—But in turn you couldn't really blame him, I should say.

Mrs. McQueston. Why?

Happy. Because the young one's quite a—a—I wouldn't

know what words you'd use, Mrs. McQueston. You might not say she was a looker, Mrs. McQueston, but, in turn, I should say any man would say she was.

Mrs. McQueston. Where does she come from?

Happy. Now that, in turn, I don't know—he not having said. He not having said a word about her. Not to me.

Mrs. McQueston. I believe that's all I wished to know then, Mr. Penny. You probably wish to go down to the dock?

Happy. Yes, ma'am. I was looking for Mr. Ruel.

Phineas. He has preceded you.

Happy. Yes, sir. Yes, ma'am. Thank you. Good evening.

[PHINEAS *bows.*]

Mrs. McQueston. Good evening.

[PENNY *goes out the inner door.*]

Phineas. Then he'll not be coming here.

Mrs. McQueston. He might, he might.

Phineas. Would you let him in?

Mrs. McQueston. I think so.

Phineas. And his women?

Mrs. McQueston. He'll not bring them here.

Phineas. If he's dragged his shame
all this way from the Pacific, why then he means

to flaunt it in our faces. I tell you the man's
a dunghill of evil! Degenerate, eater of ordure,
lower than Ruel because he has more sinew
and daring to carry it through!

Mrs. McQueston. We send over-seas
to wean the pagans of their wood and stone,
and should we do less for Nathaniel?

Phineas. Do you mean that?

Mrs. McQueston. How long is a man enamored of black flesh
when there's better to be had? I've heard it said
a man might have a lust to do his kind
with a lesser than himself, in his pride of manhood,
despising the thing beneath him, but then to live
his years with this thing despised, I think he'd hate
the flesh he used.

[*There is a pause.*]

Phineas. Where have you heard such things?

Mrs. McQueston. A woman knows them whether she's heard them or not.
And a woman knows when she's used. And woman or man,
a black's a slave, and start as high as she likes
she'll sink to be a slave, and be used for flesh
and hate her own flesh for it!

Phineas. You think beyond me.

Mrs. McQueston. Yes. I would hope so. I should like to think
beyond the immediate disgrace, and find
what lies on the further side.

Phineas. There's disgrace enough.
Even though I disown him, never see him,
Think of the fingers pointed at me: there's
that preacher whose brother married a nigger wife
and fetched her home! How much is a man of God
expected to endure?

Mrs. McQueston. Aye, your enduring!

[*She rises.*]

He's my son, bear in mind—and I suckled him
as much as you—the fingers that point, the voices
that rail, they'll cut you only because they touch
your place as a minister—but they'll search me deep,
in an old wound! I have one son already
no mother envies me, and now another
comes home to roost, this with his pockets lined
in gold that might be a stay to my old age,
only he sleeps a heathen whore in his bed,
and I'm cut off for her! Has it crossed your mind
what scalding medicine I'd drench her with
if I had the nursing of her? But that way we
get nothing, and she keeps it all! We'll wait!
Hold down whatever boils inside, and move
when we know what game he plays!

[*There is a distant shout, "Captain Nathaniel!"*]

Phineas. Well, we'll soon know.

[*Straggling voices are heard singing outside.*]

The Men.

[*Outside*]

A-roving, a-roving,
We'll sing once more, to the distant shore,
But we'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon!

Phineas. They're bringing him on their shoulders.

The Men.

[*Nearer*]

A-roving, a-roving,
To get dead tight in the dead of night,
But we'll go no more a-roving,
By the light of the moon!

[*A door opens outside.*]

Nathaniel.

[*Outside*]

Set me down, boys, set me down! This is no fitting way to enter a parson's house!

A Voice. Put him down, lads.

Another Voice. Lower the topsail! Hard a-port now! We're in!

Another Voice. Reef your jib, Happy!

Another Voice. Son-of-a-gun, you're heavy!

Nathaniel.

[*Outside*]

Feet-first, if you don't mind!

[*There is a trampling on the stoop.*]

Mrs. McQueston. Let him in, Phineas.

[PHINEAS *goes to the door and opens it. There are a number of men in the hallway, among them* HAPPY PENNY. MRS. MCQUESTON *goes to a chair and sits heavily as if half-fainting.*]

Nathaniel.

[*Coming into view*]

Now I'd ask you in, gentlemen, only this is my mother's house, as you know, and I'm home after a long absence.

Happy.

[*Outside*]

Never apologize to a sailor, sir!

[*He laughs.*]

Phineas. Will you come in, gentlemen?

Nathaniel. Phineas, as I live and swim!

[*He catches* PHINEAS' *hand.*]

Phineas. Come in, sir.

[RUEL *and* FAITH *appear at the door, and enter.*]

Come in, all of you.

[HAPPY *steps inside.*]

Happy. Well, the truth is, you see,
we know what it's like, coming into port, so we'll leave you,
and we beg your pardon, ma'am, I'm sure—it's only,
we had to give a salute.

A Voice. That's right.

Happy. And now,
in turn, we'll say good night.

Nathaniel. And good night, and thanks,
thanks for the ride, too!

A Voice. Man, we'll give you a ride
On any similar occasion!

Another Voice. Right.

Happy. Good night, and to all here.

Nathaniel. Good night. Good night.

The Crowd. Good night, captain. Good night. Good night. Good night.

[PHINEAS *closes the door.* NATHANIEL, RUEL *and* FAITH *remain.* VENTURE *has entered from within.* NATHANIEL *looks round the room, his back to the door, and his eye finally comes to his mother.*]

Nathaniel. And so the sum and substance of it is
I'm back, yes, and I never believed I'd get here—
and I hardly believe it now. Damn my two eyes
but this is a big world, mother!

Mrs. McQueston. You use big words
to tell about it, son.

Nathaniel. Now, there's the girl,
there's the mother! I half expected you'd
rear up and show me the door if I used a word,
and that was why I used it. I'm welcome, then,
damn my eyes and all?

Mrs. McQueston. Where did you think
to find a welcome, if not here?

Nathaniel. Now God
forbid all boasting, but when I chose seafaring,
and went out that door with my extra shirt done up
in a blue bandana, there were no fond farewells
as I remember—and so, one never knows
how he'll be liked coming home.

Mrs. McQueston. You'll find we like you
exactly as you like us.

Nathaniel.

[*Going to her chair*]

That's good with me,
and then to spare, if you knew how a man could long
for a cool green coast, and maybe a cool green friend
or two, left over from his youth. We never
were much for kissing in this room, but God,
God how I'm glad to see you!

[*He takes her face in his hands and kisses her brow.*]

Mrs. McQueston. Thank you, son.

Nathaniel.

[*Rising*]

And Phineas, too.

[*He takes* PHINEAS' *hand.*]

In all these seven years
there's a hand's never drawn back from shepherding
his flock, I could swear to that. And Ruel's a man,
by thunder—I hadn't noticed!

Ruel. I'm old enough,
but so far singularly of no account
in the local records.

Nathaniel. Take your time. A life's
a damn sight longer than you think.

[*He looks at* FAITH.]

Faith.

[*Giving her hand, smiling*]

No spark,
no glimpse? But all those fond farewells you said
you missed at the door, I have a faint recollection
they were spoken elsewhere!

Nathaniel. But you were a scrub with pigtails,
and a mamma-washed face! It's Faith!

Faith. Why, so it is!

Nathaniel. And now she walks like a queen, and I didn't know her!
Give us a kiss for the old-time ways and days,

when we were all younger and less beautiful.
Girl, you've betrayed me!
[*They kiss.*]

Faith. How?

Nathaniel. Getting out of hand,
growing up into goddess, and me away!
Lady, it needs looking into.

Faith. And may I ask
where you took lessons in blandishment?

Nathaniel. God's truth—
I'm solemn as an owl. And this will be
our brother Phineas' wife, and she'll kiss me too
like a good sister-in-law.

Venture. Yes, sir.
[*He kisses* VENTURE.]

Nathaniel. And now,
my hearties, as I said before, I'm back,
and it turned out better than I thought it would,
for I own a ship with two hundred tons of spice
and gums mowed away in her hold. At present prices
I don't know what it's worth, but when I left
it would have ransomed the devil out of hell
and kept the Lord God in pocket money.
[*A pause.*]

Ruel. Brother,
they'll tell you I'm no merchant, but two hundred—
two hundred tons of spices—

Nathaniel. And more than that,
I know where pepper grows in the Celebes,
and there's more there. All we want. What's the stuff
worth here?
A drug on the market?

Ruel. Man, you're just in time.
The tea's been getting weaker day by day
from the McQueston kitchen. Would you take
two hundred thousand for it?

Nathaniel. No.

Ruel. I thought not.
Well, it's worth more.

Nathaniel. I've done it, then.

Faith. Oh, yes.
And you can buy the town, as you said you would
when you went away.

Nathaniel. Then I can tell you the rest.
I've had enough of this washing up and down
across salt waters. There's too damn much salt water
on our terrestrial pumpkin, and now I'm here
with two feet planted on New England rock
I want to shake off my sea legs, sink my pile
in our old chandlery business—McQueston Sons—
and take root where I'm remembered. Have you got
the wharf?
Can you use the capital?

Ruel. Man, man, oh, man,
I tell you our tea's been weak.

Nathaniel. Will you take it, mother,
and take me in?

[MRS. MCQUESTON *rises and goes to* NATHANIEL.]

Mrs. McQueston. You've come in time. But only just in time. There's no business left. The wharf's been pledged, and the house.

Nathaniel. Then we'll have them back again.

Mrs. McQueston. You're sure you want it?

Nathaniel. If I was ever sure
of anything, mother.

Mrs. McQueston. And what must we do for you?

Nathaniel. Why, take me back.

Mrs. McQueston. Will you make it difficult?

Nathaniel. You've heard about her then. It's true I'm married.
I'm wed to a princess of the Celebes,
and I'll want you to take her too.

Mrs. McQueston. I've heard it said
that when men settle in tropic parts they buy
a native girl to live with. I've not heard
they bring them home as wives.

Nathaniel. But I've brought mine,
and she stays with me.

Mrs. McQueston. And she's a black, and worships
some pagan fetish.

Nathaniel. Black? She's a Malay princess,
but one shade darker than I am myself
with too much wind and sun. And she's a Christian,
a damn sight better Christian than I am,
or most of us.

Phineas. But keep her out of my sight
if she comes here!

Nathaniel. She'll take to you, Phineas.
She knows her Bible forward and back as well
as any divine in Salem. Taught herself
her English out of it, runs with Bible talk
like an Old Testament prophet.

Phineas.

[*Shouting*]

Why are you here?
You mate with some aborigine in a jungle,
beget your children on her, and bring her here,
to spread your baboon kisses on white women
as if nothing had happened!

Nathaniel. I'm sorry. I kissed your wife.
That won't happen again, I thank you. You
should travel, brother. Or read. You'll find some
Malays
quite twice as erudite as yourself, and proud
as Lucifer.

Phineas. How do you wipe the smell off
when you get up in the morning? To lie there tangled
into an animal's entrails, and you a man,
and you want to smirch us with it!

Nathaniel. We'll go elsewhere.
I think we can manage. Eat your cabbage-whey,
you and your virginal women!

[*He turns abruptly.*]

Mrs. McQueston. Wait!

Nathaniel. For what?

Mrs. McQueston. There was a man of Salem once who married
an Indian squaw—and brought her here to live—
wait till I finish—but they had no neighbors;
no one spoke to him in the street. He lost
what work he had. He drank himself to death,
and the children died. The squaw went back to her tribe,
and it's said they stoned her. Think well what you do
before you fetch in this bride.

Nathaniel. These sitters at home
that think their brain's the only brain there is
and the rest's all outer darkness! Sending out
your missionaries to civilizations so old
and wise they laugh at your Jesus-myth! Believing
that you're the chosen of Heaven because your skin's
a half-shade lighter than others! I've seen these peoples

you rank with animals, and I know them. They
can give you cards and spades at any game
except sheer asininity. At that
the Aryan tops the world! I've taken a wife,
from among the Malays, and she's more beautiful,
and has a better head, and sweeter ways,
and higher pride, and makes a better lover
than any celery-top among you! Aye,
and by God I'd trust her farther! That's my choice
and we'll go elsewhere!

Mrs. McQueston. No. You'll bring her here.
I've given you my warning, but if you must
you must, and we'll do as we can.

Nathaniel. I can do without you,
having heard Phineas.

Mrs. McQueston. He's not master here.
He'll keep a civil tongue.

Nathaniel. I'll want more than that.

Ruel. If she's as you say, Nathaniel, she'll be welcome
anywhere, I should think.

Nathaniel. Would you make her welcome,
and let her feel it?

Ruel. Yes, and be happy to.
Where is she?

Nathaniel. I left an order with the mate.
He's to escort them up.

Ruel. I'll go to meet her.

Faith. And so will I.

Nathaniel. You too?

Faith. Why, yes, why not?
If you love her, that's enough.

Nathaniel. Then thanks for that.
And I'll go with you.

[*They start toward the door.*]

But not if there's any doubt
how she'll be treated. She's both proud and weary
and I've offered her a haven.

Mrs. McQueston. I too am proud
and old and weary, but she shall share my roof—
since you ask it. Let her come.

[RUEL, FAITH *and* NATHANIEL *go out the front door.*]

Phineas. With your pardon, mother,
I'll not be here—nor will my wife. Perhaps
that will smooth matters.

Mrs. McQueston. You'll be in your room?

Phineas. Yes. And Venture will be, let's say, in the kitchen.
At any rate not here.

Venture. Yes, Phineas.

[*She goes out to the kitchen.*]

Phineas. And I'll be quiet.

Mrs. McQueston. It won't be for long.

Phineas. No?

Mrs. McQueston. Not for long.
Come. I must see to her room.

[*They go out together to the front hall. The room is empty for a moment, then the kitchen door opens and a dark* LITTLE GIRL *of six, very pretty and in Malay costume, comes in. She stands doubtfully a while, looking about, and finally comes to the center of the room to stare at the ship model. She runs a hand delicately over the smooth black arm of a polished chair.* OPARRE *enters, a tall, regal woman, with a noble and beautiful, though somewhat barbaric face. She is also in Malay costume.* VENTURE *follows her.*]

Venture. They were here a moment ago. They may have gone
to meet you. Will you wait here while I find them?

Oparre. It has been said in my country it's an ill omen
to come by the wrong door.

Venture. He didn't know—
the man didn't know. I'll find them.

Oparre. Would you, please?

[VENTURE *goes out the front way. A* MALAY NURSE *comes in from the kitchen, carrying a* YOUNG CHILD *asleep.*]

Is she asleep, Toala?

Toala. Yes.

Oparre. Sit here.
We must wait a little.

Toala. Dear Princess, is there any way to go
from this place to our Celebes, and cross
no water?

Oparre. No, Toala, there's no way
but in the ship. Why do you ask?

Toala. Perhaps
a time might come when one would wish to go,
and wish for ground underfoot.

Oparre. Yes. It might be.

The Little Girl. Mother, is this our house?

Oparre. It may be, Durian.

Durian. I want to go to our house.

Oparre. Hush, we must wait.
Kneel at your chair, and listen while I pray.
I must make a prayer.

Durian. Is it for me too, mother?

Oparre. Yes, for you, too.

[*She kneels at the window, and* DURIAN *kneels.*]

Dark oracles of heaven,
that blaze and burn, swung by an unseen hand,
forgive me if I give my god no name,
for men have many. But there is one law only

over the suns and tides, and He sits alone,
giver of laws, and I worship Him, and ask,
under what name is chosen, for those I love,
peace in this house. The terrible sea has been
my child bed, and my children's cradle. Blood
and a black treason lie at their beginning,
and murdered men look down upon our sleep
and curse, and will not live again, and yet
these are the ways of men, and a woman bears them,
forgiving, and a god forgives. What wars
they make, what pitiful scars they leave, what eyes
lie staring at your moon, and will not waken,
this we have seen together, but these men-children
are children still, and loved, and a woman's heart
goes out to them, even guilty. Drive us no more
for the evil we have done, let us eat our bread
beyond the salt of weeping or the sea,
these little ones and him I love, and I,
here on this shore. Yet if a gift is destined
for me alone in years to come, withhold it,
take it again, and pour on that bright head
I pillow in the night whatever meed
has been reserved for me. Forgive me too
that I should worship one who is a man
and hold him dearer than my god. For thus
have you who are my god made me, a woman,
to worship in your image. This is my prayer,
the prayer of the Princess Oparre, spoken in night,
on an unknown coast, among strangers.

[*She rises.* DURIAN *has fallen asleep at the chair.*]

It's silent here.
Not even the wash of water. And Durian sleeps.
I wish we might stay here.

[*She goes to the window.* MRS. MCQUESTON *comes to the hall door carrying a candle, sees the visitors and steps back, her loathing in her face.* OPARRE *turns.*]

Mrs. McQueston. Who are you?

Oparre. Oparre.

Mrs. McQueston. These are your children?

Oparre. Yes.

Mrs. McQueston. Must she—touch my chair?

[*Her breath comes with difficulty.*]

Oparre. She is clean, madam.

Mrs. McQueston. You are his wife.

Oparre. His wife?
I am the wife of Nathaniel McQueston.

Mrs. McQueston. I am his mother.

Oparre.

[*Smiling, stepping forward*]

Yes, he has your brow.
He's like you. I should have known.

[*A pause.*]

Mrs. McQueston. There's a room ready.
I'll show you to it.

Oparre. But tell me—we intrude here?
We're not wanted?

Mrs. McQueston. Why should you think so?

Oparre. This—
your welcome to me.

Mrs. McQueston. It's my custom to use
few words. You're welcome.

Oparre. I would not have come—
only he asked it.

Mrs. McQueston. It may be that our manners
are not like yours. When I have said you're welcome
I have said all I can.

Oparre.
[*Wearily*]
Then we are still
no better than wanderers, to be given shelter
and say farewell at morning. I had hoped
for a little respite.

Mrs. McQueston. I'll show you where you sleep.

Oparre. We are your guests.

[*She bows her head briefly, then takes a step toward the sleeping* DURIAN. PHINEAS *appears and speaks to his mother from the hall.*]

Phineas. There's an odor in the house,
mother, something like incense.

Mrs. McQueston. It's her perfume—

Oparre. Yes. I burned an incense before I came
to sweeten the cabins.

[PHINEAS *enters and sees* OPARRE.]

Phineas.

[*Grimly*]
I'm sorry. I didn't know.

[*He turns to go.*]

Mrs. McQueston. This is Nathaniel's wife.

Phineas. Aye.

Mrs. McQueston. This is my son.
Phineas, my son.

[*There is a silence.* PHINEAS *stands frozen, with averted face.*]

Oparre.

[*Doubtfully*]
There should be no greeting
between us?

Mrs. McQueston. That's as you like.

Oparre.

[*Softly, stepping toward* PHINEAS]
I wish you well
in all your ways, the brother of my husband.
May there be peace between us.

Phineas. And do you wish well
to Nathaniel?

Oparre. Yes.

Phineas. It would have been far better
if you had never seen him.

Oparre. Do you think so?

Phineas. You must know it.

Oparre. No.

Phineas. Why, keep him then.
You'll know it shortly.

Oparre. You are bitter toward me.

Phineas. Aye, I'm bitter.

[*The outside door opens.* NATHANIEL, RUEL *and* FAITH *come into the hall.*]

Faith.

[*Outside*]
They're here before us.

Nathaniel.

[*Entering with* RUEL *and* FAITH]
There, damn it,
we passed on the road, sweet, somewhere. Are we met?
Has there been exchange of courtesies?

Mrs. McQueston. I've offered
to light her to her room.

Nathaniel. The babes are tired;
that may be best. Another brother of mine,

Oparre—this one called Ruel—and Faith Ingalls,
a good friend now lang syne.

Oparre. You will forgive me.
I am strange to your customs.

Ruel.

[*Coming forward*]

You're welcome, sister,
with all my heart.

[*He takes her hand.*]

Faith. And with mine.

[*She does likewise.*]

Oparre. I thank you, truly.

Nathaniel. And now shall we put these sleepy ones to bed
before we talk?

Oparre. I must know what your brother means.

[*She looks at* PHINEAS.]

Nathaniel. What brother? Were you speaking, Phineas?
What have you said?

Phineas. I've said all I had to say.

Nathaniel. Repeat it for us. We're at a disadvantage,
having been more or less absent.

Phineas. She asked for it.
I told her only it would be better far
if she had never seen you.

Nathaniel. You told her only—
only so much?—What do you know of her
or me—or our history? The man's an oaf,
my dear. You must make allowances.

Oparre. It was meant—
what he said—and meant darkly.

Nathaniel. He's all made up
of black looks and black sayings. They breed them that way
to fill our New England pulpits. It's a business.
Let it pass.

Oparre. No.

Nathaniel. I say let it pass
and get the babes to bed. He's a quack prophet
and believes in witches. They're all cracked, these preachers.
He thinks he's Jehovah.

Oparre. Yet I shall sleep but ill
where there was unkindness toward me. I wished him well.
Sir, I wish you well still.

[PHINEAS *is silent.*]

Shall I take them up?

Nathaniel. Yes.

[OPARRE *gathers* DURIAN *into her arms and goes out to the hall followed by the* NURSE *with the* CHILD. MRS. MCQUESTON *precedes them up the stair with the candle.*]

And let me warn you, Phineas, the time's
gone by when you're man enough for me. I took
your orders once, but the shoe's on the other foot,
you'll find!

Phineas. You think to own us now because
you've piled up certain quantities of stuffs
in a ship's hold? God is not bought, nor weighs
your value by your having.

Nathaniel. Your church sells out,
like all the others, regularly. Who built
the fold you ply your trade in now? A thief,
that robbed your flock of sheep for thirty years
and paid his way to paradise by standing
the costs of their meeting-house. You reckon without
the power of Mammon, Phineas. For myself,
the deacons will be here tomorrow morning
wanting to sell me a pew.

Phineas. With a pagan wife
and octaroon children?

Nathaniel. Yes, with whatever I have
so long as I have money!

Phineas. Then mind you keep it,
for it's all you have.

Nathaniel. I'll keep it, but if I don't
I'd lose it to one of these holier-than-thous
that pull a long face over their hymns on Sunday
and dismember their victims Monday. They'll after
me

like a flight of buzzards when they smell me out
with silver on me!

Ruel. Hear, hear!

Nathaniel. And you'll be among them
if I'm any judge of medicine men!

Faith. There was once
a man who said to himself in his heart, O soul,
be comforted, we have wealth for many days;
take your ease, be merry—

Nathaniel. I know; it was unfortunate; he died;
there was also a man who had nothing at all; he died,
so that proves very little.

[MRS. MCQUESTON *and* OPARRE *come down into the hall.*]

Phineas. Take your choice,
the woman or my friendship! But not both!

[OPARRE *enters.* MRS. MCQUESTON *follows.*]

Nathaniel. Keep your friendship, yes, and your brotherly love,
you damned psalm-singing cur!

Oparre. I have wronged you, wronged you,
my husband, coming here.

Nathaniel. Not an ounce, my sweet.
You're worth the pack of them.

Oparre. You see, for him,
for what was best to him, I'd have stayed away

or drowned myself in the sea—oh, this I speak
you must believe—it is not hard to die
if one should love but a little—to pull the tides
across the eyes and lie quiet to bring rest
to him you love—this is not hard at all—

Nathaniel. You came here at my asking, and I make
no apologies!

[OPARRE *takes courage from him, and smiles.*]

Oparre. Yet seeing he loved me, and I stood
before him flushed with that love, I have dared to say:
I, even I, Oparre, lower in blood,
of pagan nurture, may I not step from darkness
in this garment like a glory he puts round me,
the garment of his love? Wearing this glory,
and proud of it, yet timid in what I am
and know myself to be, I have made my prayer
that I may be found worthy of your god
and your cities and your ways, to walk among you
almost as you—not quite despised. If I
am over-bold in this, my punishment
is sure and deep and mortal.

[*To* NATHANIEL, *pleading*]

You must let them answer.
You must not answer for them.

[*To* MRS. MCQUESTON]

You wept above stairs,
you who are his mother—I saw the tears
wrung from you, when you thought I had not seen,
and you were crying, O my son, my son,

O why were you not caught by your bright hair
among the branches?—You have wished him dead
rather than here with me.

Mrs. McQueston.

[*Stony*]

I remembered him
asleep in that room where those two of yours are
lying,
but I'm neither bent nor broken. I won't cry out
again. Not again.

Oparre. What is it that I have done?
How have I hurt you?

Mrs. McQueston. Your blood! The black blood in your
veins!
Isn't that enough?

Nathaniel. Be silent!

Oparre. Yes. Yes it is.
I feel that it is. But will you pardon me
if I ask a little for life? Where I was born
my father was the sultan of a tribe
of Minahasese. I have heard, before his time,
oh long before, the Mohammedans came down
to teach us Allah with their swords, and all
the tribes fell down to Allah. But in their hearts
they kept the old pagan rites and mysteries—
reverencing them in secret. These too were gods
of blood, revengeful, with their mouths agape

for human flesh, haters of all not ours,
so that to kill an alien in their sight
was grateful to them. My father had no son,
and I was his heir. He took me, a child, to battle,
and once when there were three leaders slain and brought
to the palace gate, he gave me a spear to carry
with an enemy's head thrust on it. The blood ran down
upon my hands and dripped among my tears,
for I'd seen the man die. This was our way of life,
and I dared not let them hear me weep, for I
was to govern, and tears were womanish; were I
as other women I might not rule. But then
when I was grown, a Christian came bound for death
on a certain altar. I saw him, and begged his life
that he might be my slave. This was your son.
—Oh, I had been hard and vengeful too, and taken
life in my hands! Still somewhere I had heard
of a god, the Christ, who had pity—and I asked
for news of this god. He answered mockingly,
your son, no lover of gods, till once, at last,
he gave me this little book of the Testaments,
and I carry it always.—Now pity me for this!
Born in deep cavern darkness, blind, and standing
suddenly in sun! As though a dog,
for worship of a man who was his god
should hunger to be man! As one new dead,
feeling warm tears upon his mouth, might grieve
to lift his heavy clay! Barbarian,
rooted in under jungle, passionate
beyond your knowing, gross in my mind and blood,

still thrusting up toward a memory of light,
not quite forgotten!

Ruel. You bring your light with you lady,
a lamb led in among butchers!

Oparre. No!

Ruel. I can hear
the sharpening of knives on every hearthstone
in this little suburb of heaven!

Oparre.

[*To* FAITH]

Your eyes are kind!
Is there hope for us here?

Faith. I don't know.

Oparre. But you,
you have no knife for me?

Faith. What lies between
two women who love one man—that lies between us.
I meant not to tell you, but when I hear you speak
I must be honest, too. Whatever comes,
or whatever I smile and say in after-time,
put no trust in me.

Oparre. You love him?

Faith. Yes.
I've always loved him. But your ways are those
of a princess, or a queen.—I'm touched and sorry,

and because of that I tell you, trust me not,
for I'm your enemy.

Oparre. If I should answer
as when I was a princess, I would say
guard yourself well who take it on yourself
to be enemy of mine! My enemies
have suffered more than I! But in this place,
still carrying in my heart the secret Christ
by whom you live, I answer, I am your friend
who have seen my husband as I see him.—Dark
as your words have been, dark as your looks at me,
evil as you may think you are, your evil
is as the play of children to the world
we two have left behind us. You are gentle
even now in your anger. There is a kindness
even in your abhorrence. Teach me that kindness.
I would live by it, for my soul is sick
of murder and a life that can be lived
only by striking quickly.

Phineas. What murder is this
you speak of? What life was lived by murder?

Oparre. Mine.

Phineas. Tell us what murder then?

Nathaniel. Has it been your notion
that matters are conducted in the South Seas
without an occasional letting of blood?

Phineas. Sir, bloodshed
smells the same here as there!

Nathaniel. Not quite. Oparre
governed a province, and sentenced men to death,
if that's a crime!

Oparre. It was more than that!

Nathaniel. We'll say
no more about it!

Oparre

[*To* PHINEAS]

Sir, if this winter coast
is tarnished by our footsteps in the snow,
as I feared it might be; if the Christ you worship
gives sanctuary only to his own
lest they be polluted, say this at once, and we
shall rouse the children, and be away. I came
only with a hope.

Phineas. We have no place here for you!

Oparre. I have done what I can. Nathaniel—
we shall go now?

Nathaniel. Yes.

Mrs. McQueston

[*Coming forward*]

Let the babes sleep.
This has come on us too quickly, and we've said
what we'll regret. It's not been easy for us—
we'll not find it easy—the words come hard—
but take a welcome for this night at least,

and rest,—and let us try.—I fear you, lady,
and fear what's in myself—for I meant to speak
no words but welcome, till a blindness rose
before my eyes, and I cried out, and you heard me—
Oh, my son, my son, and my youth that's gone,
and my high hopes gone! Why then, they're gone,
and we're here,
and this is as it is. Let us sleep, let us rest,
those who can rest and sleep. I bid you welcome,
a woman and his wife. A stranger, too,
but one we shall know better.

[*She offers* OPARRE *her hand.*]

I shall not kiss you,
not yet, perhaps tomorrow.

Oparre.

[*To* NATHANIEL]

What must I do?

Nathaniel. Take her hand. With Phineas' kind permission
we'll stay the night.

Phineas. Stay then.

Oparre. I'm sorry I came
by the wrong door. Perhaps it can be mended.
Good night.

Mrs. McQueston. Good night.

Ruel. Good night, Oparre.

Oparre.

[*At the door*]

Thank you.
It brings a warm flood round my heart to hear
my name, and gently spoken.—It was one time
the name of a princess, and I remember her
and look for too much honor.

[*She goes out to the stairway.*]

CURTAIN

THE WINGLESS VICTORY

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

SCENE: *The scene is the same as in the first act, on an afternoon of early summer, six months later. Sun streams in through the windows and the outside door, which is open. The place is empty.* DURIAN, *still in Malay costume, comes down the hall stair and slips cautiously into the room, as if venturing into forbidden and unfamiliar territory. Treading softly, not to be overheard, she looks round, then goes to a bowl of calla lilies that stands in the cold fireplace. She smells one of them in her cupped hands and draws back to look at them. The kitchen door opens and* LETTY *enters, passing through on her way to the hall. She sees* DURIAN, *who waits frozen as* LETTY *steps back, horrified, to the kitchen door. As soon as she has gone into the kitchen* DURIAN *runs lightly to the hall and climbs the stairs.* MRS. MCQUESTON *comes in from the kitchen,* LETTY *following.*

Mrs. McQueston. Where is she?

Letty. She was there, looking at the flowers.

Mrs. McQueston. Never mind. It's their house now.

Letty. Only she comes and goes like a ghost. It's frightening. She was there.

Mrs. McQueston. Never mind. Let it be.

[LETTY *returns to the kitchen.* MRS. MCQUESTON *sweeps carefully with the hearth-broom where* DURIAN *stood near the flowers, then goes to the window.* NATHANIEL *and* RUEL *come in from*

the front door, followed by a BAILIFF. NATHANIEL *speaks before they enter.*]

Nathaniel. Come in, come in, Harry. To what do we owe the pleasure of your company?

Bailiff. There's no need to come in. I just had something to give you.

[*He brings out a folded paper.*]

If you don't mind, sir.

Nathaniel. Not in your professional capacity, I hope?

Bailiff. Yes, sir. It's a service.

Nathaniel. What?

Bailiff. Yes, sir.

Nathaniel. Well, I'll be damned. Where have I run afoul of the law?

[*The* BAILIFF *comes forward and hands* NATHANIEL *the paper.* NATHANIEL *opens it.*]

Bailiff. Yes, sir.

[*He starts out.*]

Nathaniel. Wait a minute! What is this you serve me with?

Bailiff. It's only that you're to appear before the magistrate, sir.

Nathaniel. For what reason?

Bailiff. I'm sorry—but—it's named there in the paper, I think.

Nathaniel. Before Justice Urquhart—to show cause why I've not given bond for two slaves! What slaves have I?

Bailiff. I don't know, sir.

Nathaniel. I have no slaves!

[*He tears the paper and tosses it back to the* BAILIFF.]

Take that back to old yellow-face and tell him so.

Bailiff. It's not my province to take it back, sir, having once delivered it.

Nathaniel. Then tell him yourself! Tell him I've never owned a slave, and never will, which is more than he can say for himself!

Bailiff. Good day, sir.

[*He turns to the door, puts on his hat carefully, looks insolently at* NATHANIEL *and goes out.*]

Ruel. From Judge Urquhart.

Nathaniel. Yes. And if he's for bringing me into court I have a matter of an over-due note I'd like to take up with him.

Ruel. He was asking for a loan lately. This seems hardly the way to get it.

Nathaniel. I refused his loan—and this is no doubt his answer. How deep is he into us now?

Ruel. Seven thousand.

Nathaniel. I should have been watching that. It's a lot more than he's good for. He sunk his claws in us once when he had us down, and he'll do it again.

Ruel. It was Phineas let him have the money.

Nathaniel. I was willing to lend a little—to keep him a friend. And this is my reward. Give bond for two slaves! Meaning my wife and her servant! Damn Phineas and his friends! I was too cursed charitable when I took our reverend brother in as a partner!

Ruel. To say nothing of my unworthy self—

Nathaniel. You've played straight and earned what you got, but Phineas—and his church members! A thousand here for good-will—and a thousand there for good-will—and their women pass me in the street with their noses to windward! The well's dry from now on—and they'll begin to miss the water. I've made the last voyage I intend to make into the China Seas. I brought back plenty, and it was enough to set us up again, but I'll spread no more of it among his light-fingered elders. It doesn't come so easy as they might think. And it won't come so easy to them from now on.

Ruel. Then it's good-bye to Urquhart's friendship.

Nathaniel. It costs too much! He can go—with some others like him. This town's been run too long for the overly righteous. It's time we gave the devil his chance, eh, mother?

Mrs. McQueston. The devil will have his own, no doubt. I've hoped you were not one of them.

Nathaniel. I may be, at that. I met up with the devil once in the South Seas, horns and all, and the old boy was more than gracious. In fact, you owe my presence here to his kindly interest. The children of light were just about to spit me on an altar when the children of darkness intervened. It's a long story, but never speak ill of the devil, mother. He's your son's patron saint.

Mrs. McQueston. As I said, he will have his own. See to it that you are not one of them.

Nathaniel. He'd never hold his own among the God-fearing New England merchants I do business with. Just because I'm not a candidate for heaven they feel a moral obligation to take away my earthly possessions. The pious Urquhart's been running up a thundering bill with the full intention of taking bankruptcy to avoid paying us.

Mrs. McQueston. Have you refused him credit?

Nathaniel. I haven't, but I intend to.

Mrs. McQueston. It's better not to refuse it.

Nathaniel. Why?

Mrs. McQueston. He'll take it.

Nathaniel. You amaze me, mother. How is he going to take credit if I don't give it?

Mrs. McQueston. Never mind. Offer it now or you'll be the one who's asking favors.

Nathaniel. Do you understand this, Ruel?

Ruel. No. But I'm well aware that the appalling moral obliquity of this neighborhood is only equalled by its aptitude for business chicane.

Nathaniel. In other words, give them what they want or they do you out of it.

Ruel. They try to.

Mrs. McQueston. Who was done out of this house, then? Phineas or yourselves?

Nathaniel. Mother, your son Phineas put it up to me—either I got out or he would. Now I might have gone, that's true, but in walking up and down the world, accompanied by my friend the devil, I have made the curious discovery that too much honor is given the medicine men of all nations, and too little respect paid to those who bring home what is grudgingly called the bacon. I am myself a bacon-bringer of a fairly engaging sort. Phineas is a medicine man of the approved variety—sharp-faced, close-fisted, narrow-brained and even a little tight in the hind quarters. As his superior in mind, quality and stature I take my place above him in this world, and I occupy this house because it's the best in town and I like it. I understand that Phineas moved out this morning, bag and baggage, wife and wifeage, and I'm glad to hear it. We can use the room.

Mrs. McQueston. God deliver you from your pride!

Nathaniel. God deliver me from the followers of the lowly Nazarene, and their fake humility.—

[*To* RUEL]

I'll take a look at these vacated quarters.

Mrs. McQueston. If it's convenient for you Phineas wishes to see you here this afternoon.

Nathaniel. Phineas—so soon?

Mrs. McQueston. Phineas and Elder Urquhart.

Nathaniel. I see, a begging errand. Well, let them come.

[*He goes toward the hall door, followed by* RUEL. HAPPY PENNY *enters the hall through the open outside door.*]

How are you, Happy?

Happy. Excellent, sir. Thank you.

Nathaniel. Looking for Ruel?

Happy. Yes, sir. That is—yes, sir.

[MRS. MCQUESTON *goes out to the kitchen.*]

Nathaniel. Well, there he is. Come along when you're free, Ruel.

Ruel. I will.

[NATHANIEL *goes out through the hall.*]

Happy. Fine day.

Ruel. What's on the mind?

Happy. Well—

Ruel. The usual eel-skin appendage?

Happy. To tell the truth—there's more than that.

Ruel. You give me pause, Happy. What's it about?

Happy. As a matter of fact it's about Captain Nathaniel.

Ruel. My brother?

Happy. Yes, sir.

Ruel. Then why didn't you speak to him about it?

Happy. I meant to—that's the truth—but when I saw him—I didn't.

Ruel. Maybe it's something I shouldn't know.

Happy. You should know it. Or he should. It might be better if you told him. You see, it's a little hard for me to talk to him—since he's got so much money. He doesn't make it easy.

Ruel. I see.

Happy. Not that I don't understand it, what with being overrun with borrowers, and the like. Only I'd rather you passed it on to him.

Ruel. Well, I will. What is it?

Happy. There's been a lot of talk around—underneath, you know—about one of the sailors who came in on the *Queen of the Celebes.*

Ruel. I haven't heard it.

Happy. No, I don't suppose you would. The man's gone now—shipped off for the arctic whaling in the *Levantine Moon*—but he roiled up a lot of stuff before he went.

Ruel. Yes?

Happy. The story is he found a diary on board in the forecastle, all written in Dutch. Now he couldn't read Dutch, and nobody could that saw the diary, but as near as they could gather from it the *Queen of the Celebes* used to be a Dutch boat with a foreign name.

Ruel. That's quite possible.

Happy. Yes, I know it is. In fact, I know she was.

Ruel. You know it?

Happy. Yes, sir. Having a good chance on a fine dark night when I was on watch, I went down under her stern and found out the name'd been painted over. She used to be the *Nike Apteros* out of the Hague. But nobody will know that now because I took the paint right down to the wood and put on the *Queen of the Celebes* again, and nobody ever knew it was done.

Ruel. Wasn't all that a bit unnecessary?

Happy. Was it?

Ruel. It's true she had no ship's papers when she came

in, but then strange things can happen in the Southern Pacific.

Happy. Yes—and the theory is that something strange did happen.

Ruel. Such as?

Happy. Not that I believe it, remember. But the talk that goes round is that she's a stolen ship, that her crew was murdered.—In other words, they say there's been piracy somewhere.

Ruel. Where is this diary now?

Happy. That, in turn, I don't know. I wish I did—but I never saw it.

Ruel. Do you suppose the sailor took it with him?

Happy. There's been more talk than ever since he left.

Ruel. Somebody has it, then?

Happy. I'm afraid of it.

Ruel. How serious is it—if this were true of Nathaniel? Suppose he had stolen the ship and made away with the crew?

Happy. Why, that's piracy. Only it's not true. Not that.

Ruel. I know. But suppose it were. It's a capital offense under international law—isn't that so?

Happy. Yes, sir.

Ruel. We must find this diary.

Happy. Yes, sir. That's what I think.

Ruel. And now I know why you didn't speak to Nathaniel. It's not exactly an agreeable subject.

Happy. No, it's not.

Ruel. There's someone coming up the steps. We'll go to my room.

[FAITH INGALLS *enters from the porch. They meet her at the door.*]

Faith. Are there folk indoors on a day like this?

Ruel. I'm afraid so.
Business, you know. Business goes on as usual—
men must grub for silver.

Faith. Shame on you then—
it's raining gold outside!

Ruel. That's more than it's doing
here within doors.

[NATHANIEL *returns through the hall.*]

Will you forgive us worms
if we leave to go on grubbing?

Faith. Go mend your nets
if it makes you feel important! I've an errand
the kitchen way.

Nathaniel. We see you here too seldom,
Mistress Faith.

Ruel. Your pardon—

Faith. Yes—

[RUEL *and* HAPPY *go out and up the stairs.* FAITH *goes toward the kitchen.*]

Nathaniel. It's not
quite flattering, this haste.

Faith. Why—it was true—
I have an errand.

Nathaniel. But never one to me.
Not for some months. If you'd known I was here
you'd have gone to another neighbor.

[*She pauses, then lifts her hand to the door.*]

Faith. You'll excuse me—
the haste was real.

Nathaniel. Am I a shadow then
to be seen through—walked through—like a dog in the room
through which you need to pass?

Faith. No.

Nathaniel. No. A dog
would get more greeting.

Faith. Was I uncourteous?
I'm sorry if I was.

Nathaniel. When I walk to the wharf
three or four men may pass a word with me,
the rest look the other way—the women sweeping,
drag in their rugs and shut the doors behind them

lest I should catch an eye and speak. You'd think
I carried leprosy. Some half year gone
I had my last good word from you. Your rugs
are hauled in fast enough when I go by,
if you recall.

Faith. But not to be unkind.
Truly.

Nathaniel. It's hard to breathe in a vacuum,
and I've lived in one of late.

Faith. I thought you happy.
You're happy with her.

Nathaniel. Yes.

Faith. Let's say no more.
It's better to say nothing of such things.

Nathaniel. Such things as what?

Faith. We have our separate lives
to live. Let it go at that.—But I could warn you,
if you want a kindly warning, you won't win
the town's good word by lending money to them.
A creditor's always hated.

Nathaniel. I know that.
I've discovered that. A little late.

Faith. Then keep
your fortune for yourself. They laugh at you
behind your back for these loans.

Nathaniel. And you? Do you
laugh with them?

Faith. No. I make very little use
of laughter this last year.

Nathaniel. What things are these
it's better not to speak of?

Faith. Nothing.

Nathaniel. Then
for God's sake give me a word or two sometimes
just to water the desert. I begin
to hate these streets and the people on them. Yes,
and hate myself.

Faith. I tried to be kind at first—
to say, we could meet as always, put good luck
and bad behind.—I had my share of bad,
but that could be forgotten. Then I couldn't.
Little by little I couldn't.

Nathaniel. Why? Am I
so changed?

Faith. Yes.

Nathaniel. I don't feel it.

Faith. Not in yourself.
But when we think of you we think of her.
And it's not as if she were one of us. I've never
thought much about what it was like to be
an alien—but—if you still loved me, say,

and I'd married a black—how would you think of
me—?
would it seem to change me?

Nathaniel. That's it then?

Faith. I tried—
I tried not to have the thought—but it haunted me—
at nights—when you were with her.—It's better, I
know,
not to speak of such things.—But we've been friends—
I wanted to be your friend. And I choke on that—
it won't go down.—And if that's true of me,
who wish you well, you know how it is with the
others
who wish you all misfortune.—I'm a fool
to let you know of this.—It's you who win.
You have your way in the town—live as you please—
we can't hurt you.

Nathaniel. No. But I can be driven
mad!—And sometimes I think I am mad.—Say
you'd married as I have—for love—and loved him
still—
and had two dark-skinned children—and you lived
in a few rooms with this same black love of yours—
and black children, and a black servant—while the
town
stepped round you carefully—pointing, whispering,
never to you—always among themselves—
laughing a little when you come down the street—
behind their hands—some excellent jest, no doubt,

at your expense.—It's hard to maintain your love—
you begin to gnaw at this thing you're chained to, even
hate where you love—curse at it in secret, curse
yourself and all the world equally. That's why
I stopped you here this morning. I must speak
to someone—I must have some touch with the world
outside those rooms upstairs. But now you tell me
you're like the rest.—I'll wake some morning and find
the bed-clothes stained with blood—and know I've killed her—
her—and the children—and that damned negroid thing
that waits on us—and not dare to look—but know
I've done it. I thought you might have saved me. Well—
let it go. You can't.

Faith. Do you love her still?

Nathaniel. Yes, by God, I love her.

Faith. But this is horrible.

Nathaniel. It's everyday. It's all the days there are.
And all alike.

Faith. But it must end.

Nathaniel. There's no end,
except that time goes on, and time makes changes—
time sometimes makes changes.

[DURIAN *runs down the stair, through the hall and on into the outdoors.* FAITH *turns toward the win-*

dow. OPARRE *comes down the stair dressed like the women of Salem, looks out after* DURIAN, *then enters the room.*]

Oparre. These children have good eyes! She clung to our room
until today—because, she tells me gravely,
she was afraid of the man in black, but now
he's gone, and she can run!

[*To* FAITH]

I'm glad to see you.
I had hoped you would come often.

Faith. Thank you.

Oparre. See,
when she stoops over a rose she touches it
and gives it a child's name. Forgive me, she's
not beautiful to you?

Faith. Yes. Yes, she is.
She flashes like quicksilver. And changes, too,
I think, quick as quicksilver.

Nathaniel. This dress is new.

Oparre. Yes,
I have cast my Malay chrysalis
and emerge with little wings! May it be a sign
that I am now New England!

Faith. But did you make it?

Oparre. Yes, from the outside in, I fear, not knowing
the secrets of your needlework. It's wrong?

Faith. It's beautiful.

Oparre. If only this swarthy face
of mine were not above it.

Faith. The best of us
could do no better.

Oparre. You see, Nathaniel,
my handiwork is praised.

Nathaniel. It's a marvel, and
goes marvelous well with you.

Oparre. And the face?

Nathaniel. The face
is still my favorite of faces.

Oparre. Then—
I have done well—I won't be laughed at, truly,
for wearing it?

Nathaniel. You'll be envied.

Oparre.
[*To* FAITH]
I'll take it off.
You think I shouldn't wear it.

Faith. Oh, please—indeed
it's beautiful—and you must wear it.

Oparre. Yes?
You are the first to see it. Perhaps the others
will like it if you like it.

Faith. The others?

Oparre. The women—
the women of Salem,

Faith. If they judge by the eye
they'll have no fault to find.

Oparre. But they'll not judge so—
is that your meaning?

Faith. Not at all.

Oparre. We'll try.
You could help me if you would.

Faith. I'm afraid—I couldn't.—
Not I.

Oparre. No? I forget. We are enemies.
That makes a bond between us. I've heard it said,
good enemies make good friends.

Faith. I wish you no harm.
I hadn't meant to stay. I'll go.

Oparre. Yes, surely.
Surely, if you wish it.

[*Silent,* FAITH *crosses the room and goes out.*]

It's that she loved you,
and it comes to mind.

Nathaniel. Yes.

Oparre. Do you know what I plan?

Nathaniel. No, dear—what is it?

Oparre. To make a change, a great change.
I've kept myself a prisoner in my room
too long. We shall not win them if I sit
cross-legged and brooding.

Nathaniel. No—I know.

Oparre. And—yes,
now that the winter's over and the spring
warms up my tropic blood, I begin to hope—
it's so old a thing, this hope, men cherish it
beyond all reason,—and so I dream and wonder
whether this Salem has not grown accustomed
to my barbaric face and step—may not now
almost receive me—

Nathaniel. Almost?

Oparre. I'd be content
with a half-countenancing—if the women-folk
would say once, Yes, my dear, we sew tomorrow;
come, draw a hem with us! Not really caring
if I accept, not bothering much about me
as I sit there sewing—oh, smiling a little over
my odd ways with the needle—but still not angry
that I should come—

Nathaniel. Would this help?

Oparre. It would pour oil
in old and sinister wounds. You know they sew
for foreign missions. They sit in a circle there
conversing of the scandals of this world—
mostly of me—while making decent garments
for little heathen girls across the seas
that run stark naked. It's a sweet thought; no, truly,
it is sweet of them.

Nathaniel. Pardon me. Did I smile?
Would you sew for their foreign missions?

Oparre. I'm so starved
for a word with my women-kind—it does no harm
to clothe the little things—

Nathaniel. Who told you about it?

Oparre. Ruel—and, oh, he brought me a picture, too,
they passed about the circle to stir their zeal
for the work in hand. Ten little nudities
caught somewhere on an island, grouped in a ring
all innocent of costume. And it's supposed
they've seen a resemblance, and I was one of these
with nothing on. Which face they thought was mine
I couldn't tell, but if I go I'll swear
that I was one.

Nathaniel. Well, they shall ask you to go
if you want them to. But I'd rather you went as
yourself
and not as a sample heathen.

Oparre. Oh any way
that pleases them, take off my clothes, perhaps,

and pose there for their little savage child,
grown older, if it would help.

Nathaniel. Don't shock them, darling;
a lack of clothing is a cardinal sin
in temperate regions.

Oparre. Could I ask something more?

Nathaniel. Why, yes—what it is?

Oparre. I see these men and wives
of Salem, up and down the street, on days
that may be prearranged, go walking out
to visit one another—he in his best,
she in a satin gown—or bombazine,—
and this was most amusing back at first—
when I watched them from my window. Only now
I feel a simple longing to be one
of these same wives, to walk beside my husband
with a gloved hand on his arm,—it's laughable
I know, for me to think it—yet might we, sometime,
or would it be too strange?

Nathaniel. To walk with me—?
You shall certainly take my arm, and wear a gown,
and drink tea with them if you like. It's not
so very entertaining.

Oparre. And sometime, too,
could I pour tea for them—and you'd wait there with me
and sit beside me? If you were there—

[*She pauses.*]

Nathaniel. I wonder—
I wonder what my mother'd think of that—
but we'll persuade her.

Oparre. Is she supposed to pour
all the tea that's poured in this house?

Nathaniel. No, no. The mistress
pours her own tea—and you're mistress here.

Oparre. Have you wished
for another mistress, dear—or been sorry at all
for the days when you first loved me?

Nathaniel. Never.

Oparre. Because
if you had I could forgive you, but not her
and not myself.

Nathaniel. Why think of it?

Oparre. The fire
that melts down mountain barriers, and runs
the rock to lava, if it should cool would leave
only the frozen slag between us, fixed
with cold, glassy, impenetrable.

Nathaniel. It will cool
when the great fire under the mountains cools, Oparre,
not till then. The longer it lies quiet
the madder it will burn.

Oparre. Does it burn still?

Nathaniel. With the same madness, sweet. So that when
I touch you
this ground I stand on shifts away from me
and we're alone on a certain coral edge
where you turned to me and I kissed you. A goddess
rose
from that shallow water, to make me half a god
and keep me so—keeps me still—

Oparre. I've wished
there might be one coast on this earth that was neither
yours nor mine. I'm alien here. You were alien
where I was loved. Is there nowhere a kingdom
that would count us equals? None?

Nathaniel. Could we go back?

Oparre.

[*Shaking her head*]

No.

Nathaniel. Then we stay here,
and make them like it.

Oparre. Can we never make them friends?

Nathaniel. We can face them—and face them down! If
I have to buy
the chattel mortgages of half the town
till we own the dishes they eat from! Whom I choose
I choose, and she I choose shall be equal with them
or set above them!

Oparre. Is it still so desperate?
That we must buy our welcome?

Nathaniel. They give you nothing
in this town you don't pay for!

Oparre. I fear my dress,
and the pretty plans for having them to tea—
these are hopeless then.

Nathaniel. I'm afraid so.

Oparre. Then we'll go.
We made a kingdom for ourselves at sea,
and could again.

Nathaniel. I can't leave. I don't know
whether they were too foxy for me, or I played
the game right into their hands—but I've sunk what I had
in this damned chandlering business—what with debts
and capital invested and people owing—
till I couldn't raise a stiver to go to sea—
and even the ship's a company matter now—
not my own!

Oparre. We're fast here.

Nathaniel. Square on the bar
till the cash comes in again. It's safe enough;
we're rich if we stay here, but if we go
we've nothing.

Oparre. I would rather go with nothing
than purchase their good-morning—live here on suf-
france
because they owe us money—

Nathaniel. They'll accept us
before the year's out! One at a time they'll come
with their hats on their bellies to ask us out to tea
or dinner—or what have you!

Oparre.

[*Putting her hands on his shoulders*]

Dearest—I've loved you
past worship, and more now since you do this thing
to make a home for me—but is it worthy
of what we are—what you wished to be?—I've made
you
less than yourself! To lash and threat and bargain
for place and friends! Though we take nothing with
us
let us go with nothing but our bare hands
to live elsewhere as we can.

Nathaniel. Yes, but live where?
One town's like another. We're people of substance
here,
and they're at our feet. But suppose we had to face it
with no hold over them? I think you'd find
they could make it devilish bitter.

Oparre. It's bitter now.

Nathaniel. But it could be worse. By just how much you own
things can be worse if you lose it.

Oparre. I have nothing.
Nothing but your love. All else I've lost
or given or flung away. Pitch an Indian camp
with skins to cover us in a smoking tepee—
you'd find me loving as here. And proud to love you.
And happier.

Nathaniel. Let them keep it? Let our Phineas
swallow it down, what we played with lives to get,
and won't get again?

Oparre. Yes.

Nathaniel. Well, I can't do it—and won't.
We stay—and fight it out.

[RUEL *and* HAPPY PENNY *come to the hall door from the stair.*]

Ruel. I beg your pardon.
Could Penny speak to you a moment, Nat?
Something important.

Nathaniel. Why, yes—what is it? We've
no secrets, have we?

Ruel. He'd rather see you alone
if you don't mind.

Happy. It's nothing about myself, sir—
something you should know.

Nathaniel. We'll go upstairs.
Have you heard this?

Ruel. Yes. I'll wait here. You may want me.

Nathaniel. Let's get it over. I'll be back.

[NATHANIEL *and* PENNY *go up the stairs.*]

Ruel. We've had
one sunny day at least.

Oparre. Yes.

Ruel. Isn't that Durian
skittering down the lawn?

[*She nods*]

She'll break some hearts
when she's fourteen and past. Or is it sooner
with children of the south?

Oparre. Yes—sooner.

Ruel. Then
I speak for her hand in marriage. She's enchanting—
just the way she draws breath.

Oparre. Why did he wish
to speak with Nathaniel?

Ruel. He? I don't know. Oh—Happy—
nothing in special. Some rumor. Some trade, I guess—
business, no doubt.

Oparre. You know what it is.

Ruel. I do?
Yes, but it's nothing.

Oparre. I thought you were my friend.

Ruel. I am, too. If you should ever need a friend
remember that I am, Oparre. Not
a summer friend, but one to count on.

Oparre. Tell me.
We have something to fear?

Ruel. What makes you think so?

Oparre. Only a catch in his voice.

Ruel. I don't know yet.
It's better not to say it till it's known.

Oparre. Yes—Do you have a legend in your tongue
of a palace built of words, and how a beggar
lived there, and drank a magic wine, and ate
what magic food he wished, and how the floor
was solid underfoot, the walls were stone,
the gates were barred with iron—then one day
because of one word spoken, a casual word,
all this was suddenly gone; where the palace stood
a little stream ran through willows?

Ruel. Yes.

Oparre. Suppose
a whole world built on a word, a sky and stars,
grass underfoot, sand at the ocean's edge,
and men and women, and all they have—but this

one word unsaid and the world's not there. Was never
there, has not been, cannot be imagined. This
is a woman's world when she loves. If I should lose
him,
if one word were unsaid, the earth's gone. Then
where it rode, there's only a little ailing wind
lost quickly in the night.—He changes here.
He's not as he was. Have you seen it ?

Ruel. No, I haven't.
He's just the same as always.

Oparre. Then it's my fear.
I was afraid he grew more like them, reckoned
too much in dollars.

Ruel. When you've been poor your dollars
mean a lot to you.

Oparre. Then I'm mistaken.

Ruel. Yes.
He's as I've always known him.

[*There are steps on the porch outside.* PHINEAS, URQUHART *and* MUNGO *come to the door through the hall.* PHINEAS *enters, followed by the others.*]

Oparre. Yes?

Phineas.

[*To* RUEL, *ignoring her*]

Is your brother
Nathaniel here?

Ruel. I think so.

Phineas. Would you call him?

Ruel. No.

Phineas. Why not?

Ruel. Sir, the lady of the house
is here, and awaits your greeting.

Phineas. Give her my greeting
if you wish, and call Nathaniel!

[OPARRE *walks slowly out and up the stairs.*]

Ruel. I hadn't hoped
to see these pleasant faces all together
again in this house. Some other deacon's got
his maid with child, no doubt?

Phineas. Whatever business
you may have to attend to—go tend it.

Ruel. Come—
that's not so bad! I live here.

Phineas. Go or stay—
it's nothing to us.

Ruel. I'll remain.

[NATHANIEL *comes in from the stair,* PENNY *behind him.*]

Nathaniel. Good evening, sirs.
You wished to see me?

Phineas. Yes.

Nathaniel. Well, fire away.

Phineas. In this company?

Nathaniel. It's about a loan, I believe—
or, at least, an extension of credit. I see no reason
for privacy.

Phineas. You may wish you'd kept it private.

Nathaniel. Why should I make it easier for you? No,
we'll out with it once for all, by Judas—make it
a proclamation to the citizens
of Salem—Jesus junior here and all
his sycophant apostles! I've made loans
and bought up worthless mortgages and made
investments in your water-logged concerns
till I've run short of cash and patience! Now
we face about. It's time for a reckoning!
I can lend nothing more to Justice Urquhart
on note or bond or mortgage, signatured
by whom you please! This goes for the entire town!
No more! The spring's run dry where you drank your
fill
through this last drouth!

Phineas. Come, brother—

Nathaniel. You're about to say
you know there's money left in the till. Not much—
and what there is is needed! More than that,
I could use some of what you've got already
and may go after it. There are notes overdue,

mortgages to foreclose, some businesses
I could sell over a ring of godly heads
if I insist on cash. And I shall do it
unless you make my stay here pleasanter
than you made it this last winter.

Urquhart. In what way
can we be of service to you?

Nathaniel. Not by setting
a plague-cross on my door, and scudding by
with heads averted, not by summonsing
my presence to give bond for slaves, when all
my household is my wife and her one servant
and her two children! For that simple insult,
Justice Urquhart, I shall require of you
to the last penny, what shows on my books
as owing me from you! To be paid tomorrow
before the sunset! Or in lieu of that
that your fine wife in her silk neckerchief
invite my wife to tea, and have us there
together, with your whole church-going crowd,
and treat us to your best, and treat us well
as you may wish for mercy!

Phineas. It was of your wife
we came to speak. What was her origin?

Urquhart. And where were you married?

Nathaniel. She's a woman, born of woman, better born
than the best of those you've lived with.

Phineas. Then tell us first
where you purchased the *Queen of the Celebes.*

Nathaniel. The ship?
Is this an admiralty court? My brother,
my history's my own.

Phineas. You'll answer, though—
now or later.

Nathaniel. By what right do you ask
your questions?

Phineas. Sir, as co-sharer in the ship
I'm legally liable if there were fraud
or violence behind your title to her.

Nathaniel. Well, sir, if there were fraud or violence
you'd lose by making it known. But there was none.
Sleep easy. I came by her honestly. How it occurred
I keep to myself.

Phineas. Do you, though? I came by chance
on part of her history. She was once, as you know,
I think, of Dutch registry—and her name, translated,
was *The Wingless Victory.*

Nathaniel. It's news to me.
She was never so called since I've known her.

Phineas. But she was.
And you'll admit it.

Nathaniel. Why, damn your soul—what cause
would I have to deny it if it were true?

Phineas. Good cause.
Let me inform you where you took that ship,
and how and from whom. There were three sailors
on her—
three Dutchmen, all three of them dead now. She
lay
off Singapore at the time. You killed these men,
took a new crew from the port and changed her name,
sailed her home with her cargo, and that's the story
of how you came back to Salem.

Nathaniel. Three mutineers
tried to take the ship from me, her captain and owner,
and got themselves killed. That's all there was to it.
Hell,
they earned what they got. And so did I!

Phineas. A sailor named Van Zandt
who came with you from Singapore, picked up
a ship's log in his berth. The data's there,
complete—enough to constitute an indictment.
There's a translation made. If the facts were published
your stature might be lessened by a good deal—
or lengthened by some inches.

Nathaniel. Here's the plain truth:
I was a prisoner once to a certain sultan
in the Celebes. He was Oparre's father,
and refused to trade with foreigners, hated the Dutch
because they'd burned his villages some years
before I came there. Well, a Dutch ship came in
looking for spice, and we persuaded him

to load it up and then capture it. We wanted
to get away, Oparre and I. We took
three Dutchmen who survived and stole the ship
from the sultan—ran toward Singapore—on the way
these three decided to wrest the ship from me
and I shot them down. The rest you know. I managed
to pick up a crew and get home. The ship was forfeit
before I took it. The Dutch had no more claim
than I had to it.

Phineas. A court would hold so?

Nathaniel. What court
will ever hear about it?

Phineas. The courts will hear.
I shall let them know.

Nathaniel. Why, you fool, whatever we own
goes down the drain, ship, business, stock and all,
if the law gets hold of it!

Phineas. Yes, and well I know that—
and so do you. And more than that, you're open
to criminal process.

Nathaniel. For what?

Phineas. For piracy!

Nathaniel. If you care to cut your own throat, bring it on!

Phineas. I will.
Save on one condition.

Nathaniel. To hell with your conditions!
I'll make no pact wih you.

Phineas. You see, it happens
we have the evidence in our hands. If we
are silent, then there's nothing said; you're safe.
And we'll say nothing, burn the diary
and the logbook—if you send the woman Oparre
back to her people.

Nathaniel. Well, I prefer to hang.
The woman Oparre! Damn you, when you speak
of my wife, do so by her title!

Phineas. Is she your wife?

Nathaniel. You have heard me say so!

Phineas. When you put in at New Bedford
on your way home, you sought out a minister
and asked him to marry you—but he refused.
What words you may have mumbled over yourself
and her, on the high seas, I don't know. But she
is not legally your wife.

Nathaniel. I owe it to her
that I'm alive and here. I'm more bound to her
than book, bell and candle binds you! She betrayed
her father, coming with me. If she went back
he'd make short work of her.

Phineas. Send her where you like,
only far enough. The ship's rigged out and ready
for a voyage to Indo-China. Let the woman go,

or I swear I'll go through with this. You've held the whip,
and pushed your black brood on us, and laughed to see how we took the stench! We'll wipe that laughter out one way or another!

Nathaniel.

[*After a pause*]

You'd do that?

Phineas. Yes! We've made
our plans! Make yours!

Nathaniel. Look, Phineas—
this is hardly a question on which a man
makes compromises. You have a wife of your own.
You chose her yourself. You'd brook no interference
in your life with her. I'll stand just as little in mine.
It follows that you ruin us both to wreak
a revenge on me I've scarcely earned.

Phineas. The cases
are not quite comparable, thank you. Then
you've given your answer?

[NATHANIEL *is silent, then turns away and walks to the window.* MRS. MCQUESTON *slips in quietly from the kitchen.* NATHANIEL *turns back.*]

Nathaniel. You're one of them, no doubt?
You've heard of this?

[*She closes her mouth grimly.*]

Well, speak!

Mrs. McQueston. I've heard of it.

Phineas. We give you a further choice. If it suits you better
follow your woman. We'll press no suit against you,
if you're both away.

Nathaniel. Leaving the money safe
in your reverend hands!

Phineas. Take with you what you can gather.

Nathaniel. And that's exactly nothing. Well, we'll go.
We'll go together, and leave you to your virtue
that undresses under sheets!

Phineas. I'm sorry to hear it—
and you'll be sorry later.

Nathaniel. How do I know
what proofs you have? You'd lie about it. Yes,
and you have lied! Where's this sailor—this Van Zandt
and his record books?

Urquhart. Bring him in.

[MUNGO *goes out to the porch and returns with* VAN ZANDT, *a sailor, who looks about him questioningly, then fixes on* NATHANIEL. *He takes a small black-bound book from his pocket.*]

Do you wish to hear him?

Nathaniel. No! Take him out! I know what he has to say!
Take him out!

[MUNGO *nods to* VAN ZANDT, *who puts up his book hesitatingly again and goes.*]

And get out, all of you! We can live
without you.

Phineas. Very well.

Nathaniel. But let me tell you
what you're doing, you disciples of the word
and seekers after holiness! You're willing
to compound what you say's a felony, if I'll
accede to your dirty bargain—compound it with you
and send my wife away! But if I don't
then I can either get out of town or hang,
one or the other, while you three line your nests
with stolen goods! Set that in the mealy records
of your mealy-mouthed church of God! It'll look well
there,
while you fur your coats with what you thieve from
me
and pray for heathen sinners. Money changers!
A money changer's an honest man compared
with these pilfering churchmen!

Phineas. Good-day, then.

Nathaniel. Where are you going?

Phineas. To the custom house. I wash my hands of you.
The authorities will be informed, and can take
whatever steps they wish.

[PHINEAS, URQUHART *and* MUNGO *start toward the door.* TOALA *comes down the stair and looks in, calling* DURIAN. *She steps back apologetically,* NATHANIEL'S *eyes are riveted on her.*]

Nathaniel. Give me a moment.
You can afford to wait.

Phineas. You have this moment,
and then no more. We don't trust what you'd do
if you had more.

Nathaniel. Send her back then. Send her.
I'll have nothing to do with it.

Phineas. I didn't hear you?

Nathaniel. I say get it over! Send her back! You've wanted
just that—and you've got it! And what was good in me
goes with her! Make away with her if you must,
but you'll not get what I have!

Phineas. You stay in Salem?

Nathaniel. I stay in Salem. What's mine's still mine, by God,
and you won't get it!

Phineas.

[*To* TOALA]

Go find your mistress. Ask her to come here.

[TOALA *goes up the stairs.* NATHANIEL *sits.*]

Nathaniel. For God's sake—do it yourselves—I can't tell her—
no—I won't be here—

[*He rises.*]

Mrs. McQueston. You want it yourself.
You've wanted her away. I've seen it.

Nathaniel. Devil!

Mrs. McQueston. Say what names you please. You'll be glad she's gone.
I knew it would come. Shift the blame on us if you like.
We'll take it.

Nathaniel. Then you send her back to her death.
It'll mean death to her.

Mrs. McQueston. Women don't die so easy.
They bear pain better than men.

Nathaniel. I'll go.

Mrs. McQueston. No—stay.
She'll listen to no one else.

[NATHANIEL *sits again.* RUEL, *after a look at* NATHANIEL, *suddenly crosses the room and signals* PENNY. *They go out and across the porch together.* OPARRE *comes down the stair and into the room.* NATHANIEL *stares at the floor.*]

Oparre. What is it, Nathaniel?

Phineas.

[*To* URQUHART]

Speak to her.

[*He moves away.*]

Urquhart. Lady, the ship is victualed and waiting
to catch the tide in the morning. It's the plan
that you sail with her. You'll need some time, no doubt,
for your preparations.

Oparre. What ship is this?

Urquhart. What ship?
The Wingless Victory.

Oparre. I know no vessel
by such a name.

Urquhart. The *Queen of the Celebes,*
if you insist.

Oparre. You spoke of a plan. Whose plan?

Urquhart. It's been agreed upon.

Oparre. By my husband?

Urquhart. He
accedes to it.

Oparre. For myself—I could be glad.
I wished to go, but my husband did not wish it.
How does this come?—Will you not speak to me,
Nathaniel?

Nathaniel. They came on the history
of how I took the ship, that's all, stumbled on it—
so they make me out a pirate. Under the law
perhaps I was.

Oparre.

[*To* URQUHART]

Would you make use of this?
For myself, as I told you, where I go
will grieve me little, so we're away and clear
of venomous tongues. But for Nathaniel
it's bitter—and bitterly unjust. To earn
a place and fortune in a world where both
come late or seldom—to earn them young and then
face exile—for no fault—because he loved me—
for there's no other reason—this is a sentence
bred of your malice—

[NATHANIEL *rises, facing her.*]

Mungo. You misundertand—

Oparre. I've known him
long and well now. What you have seen in him
since he came home—his anger, and his pride—
these are not real.—No, I have known him watch
a wounded man two days and nights, and nurse him
tenderly as a child. I've seen a child
turn toward him in an illness when his hands
were gentlest and most grateful. He's not hard,
but kindly, careful, pitying toward those
who have been hurt or need help. You'll find him so

if there's ever a need among you. This is no man
to banish from your town.

Urquhart. He's not banished, lady.
The plan is you go alone.

Oparre. But, gentlemen,
my husband is accused of piracy.
Of what am I accused?

Mungo. We're satisfied
if you go, and he stays here.

Oparre. Why, then, forgive me,
but you will learn it's not in your power to part
two who would stay together. You may decide
these things for those who love by custom. We
have a world beyond you.

[RUEL *and* FAITH *come quietly to the hall door.*]

Mungo. Damn it, are you deaf
and blind?

Oparre. Deaf and blind to such as you!

Phineas. Then ask him!

Oparre. Then for your satisfaction, but not mine,
I do ask him. They have planned to part us,
my husband. Is there any answer fitting
such men as these?

Nathaniel. We'll go away together.

Oparre. You hear?

Nathaniel. I know
a certain island where the Netherlanders
never touch. It's not on their charts, but all
the natives say it's rank with pepper trees
down to the water. Give me a ship again
and capital, and we'll hunt this island down
and build another fortune. Phineas,
it may bleed the firm down dangerously but stake me
with what's left, and I'll try again and pay you back
twice over. It's too damned little but it might do.

Phineas. No money, no argosy,
no profit, though it came to a dozen times
the venture, how would that compensate us for a soul,
a soul sent forth and lost?

Nathaniel. What soul?

Phineas. Your own.

Nathaniel. Mind your own soul, and I'll mind mine!

Phineas. I take
small interest in a treasure or return
that hangs on human sacrifice, a brother
lost into everlasting fire to snatch
one poor ship-load of spices. If you go,
and go with her, back to the ancient witchcraft
by which she lives, back to her obscene gods,
you're lost to life forever. Do you think to pay me
in coin for this?

Nathaniel. By God you've taken coin
from me before!

Phineas. To hold you here, to break
her witch's power upon you! For myself
I want no penny of gain! Yes, if you stay,
you shall have every penny you've put in,
for I don't want it, have no use for it,
want nothing out of it! But the woman Oparre
has hung her walls with idols, worships them
in secret, corrupts your heart, blackens your mind
and snares your body with her flesh! Go with her,
and you go penniless! Renounce her here
and take back what was yours!

Nathaniel. You offer freely
what you'll never be asked to give.

Ruel. The man's gone mad!
She worships your Christ!

Phineas.

[*To* OPARRE]

What is your worship, woman?
What god do you bow down to?

Oparre. When I came
I worshipped as you worship, but when I knew you
there was a kind of blackness in my heart
for a long time. Sir, there are gods and gods,
each with his many faces, some of good
and some of evil, each race with its own,
but the most jealous are the lesser gods,
such as you own, of bitterness and wrath
and eternal fire. And when I try to pray

then all these lesser gods go through my mind
angry and savage, thrusting away the Christ,
and I pray to the unknown god.

Phineas. And who is he?

Oparre. He is the unknown god.

Nathaniel. And that won't do.
I see that by their faces. We take our way
to the other end of the world tonight, foot-loose
and nothing in our pockets.

Oparre. Will it be so hard?

Nathaniel. Hard? To have nothing—no cash—no home
—the ship
gone, too—two children to take care of—just
our hands—beach combers, you and I—a white man
living with a Malay—faking palaver
to get a dollar from a sailor?—Yes,
that's how we'll look to them—and what we'll be
till we can get a start.—When they've sunk to the
beach
they stay on the beach, I've noticed.

Oparre. Is there no way
I could make it easier? If we love enough
we could be parted, even by a world
and yet not lost. If what they want of you
is that you let us go alone, they count
on the great distance and the years to change
your need for me. But I shall not be changed,
nor you.—Would this be sufficient?

Phineas. Quite sufficient.

Oparre. Shall I go alone, Nathaniel?

Nathaniel. It's not safe
for a woman in the Indies.

Oparre. I shall keep safe
if I may wait for you.

Nathaniel. Would you, Oparre?
Would you take what money I have, wait there in the East
till I can leave?

Faith. Go with her. If you're here
you know what will come of it—you'll stay, and then
you won't forgive yourself. Go with her.

Nathaniel. Christ—
do you know me so much better?

Faith. Yes.

Nathaniel. We've found
a plan, and a way out of it! Let us alone!
Who's to live my life?

Urquhart. You've made your decision?

Oparre. Sir—
will you all pardon if I ask—would you leave me
alone with my husband—for a moment? This—
this should be between us only. I will call you—
very quickly—

[*One by one they go out, leaving* OPARRE *alone with* NATHANIEL.]

There's such a thing as a love
that holds the world well lost—I thought it was ours—
perhaps it was only mine.

Nathaniel. I love you enough.
You don't know what they've done.

Oparre. I see it quite well.
They've made you choose between us.

Nathaniel. If you think I choose them—
you're wrong. I want no part of them.

Oparre. What is it—
what is it you choose?

Nathaniel. I love you still—but they've made
our love a torment—it's the world that does it—
it won't have us together.—We touched at ports
before we came here—east and west—and always
I saw them pointing at us—there goes a white man
with a black woman—they think us obscene—somehow
they make it obscene.—They make me ashamed of my love—
as you were ashamed of me before your father—

Oparre. Never!

Nathaniel. He hated me—as they hate you here—
and he'd have killed me—if we hadn't tricked him
and got away.—I tell you it can't be done—
hard as we've tried!

Oparre. You want me to go alone?

Nathaniel. For God's sake, yes.

Oparre. And will you follow?

Nathaniel. I don't know! I don't know!

Oparre. I should say nothing, I know—
now that you've said this. I should let it go
and be silent. Only—if I'm silent now—
that's the end. One clutches at a pillar
when the temple falls, though it carry you down.

Nathaniel. It's not
the money—or the ships—that's something, but
when we're together we're in an empty world—
we live nowhere—we're not counted—we're
some kind of horrible presence they're always trying
to explain away—

Oparre. Then—only one word more—
will there be a world—any world—in the midst of men
and houses—or what's to buy and sell—or say—
if we part here—and the world we had together
goes down with the sun?

Nathaniel. I don't know. But I know
I'm beaten, and we're parted. Perhaps a woman
never knows when she's beaten. They won't have it!
Nowhere on this earth will they have it! Look—
I've tried to meet it—every way there was,
with force and money and flattering—it's no use—
it was no use from the beginning!

Oparre. I'm to go—
and you're to stay.

Nathaniel. Find another answer for me!

Oparre. Then I've never known you, nor you me.
I've never known you, and I'm alone.

Nathaniel. Good God,
don't you know I'm tortured too?

Oparre. Did you want me to go?
Does this fall in with your plan?—
A man of wood—
a figure-head of pith and straw—an effigy
cut out of paper would feel more! You tortured!
Your feeble rankling! If you felt pain you'd know
what danger you stand in now! Look to yourself!
Speak!—cry out if you're anguished!

Nathaniel. I've done my crying!

Oparre. Cry out, I say! I want to hear you cry!
Are you iron or tin or bronze—to stand and say
I'm to go—and let it go!

[*She goes toward him.*]

Nathaniel. It's no use.

Oparre. Cry out!
If you're not wood I'll make you cry with my hands!
With my hands! Do you hear me!

[*She strikes him across the face.*]

Nathaniel. This is not worthy of you.

Oparre. Not worthy of me! He's cut out of stone and his heart
bleeds water! Will you not cry?

[*The* MEN *appear at the door.*]

Speak! Weep!
Let me see your tears! Here are mine!

Nathaniel. Be still!

Oparre. Come in!
All these white frightened faces, come in and hear!
We have news for you. I have been misled
a long time by your Christ and his beggar's doctrine,
written for beggars! Your beseeching, pitiful Christ!
The old gods are best, the gods of blood and bronze,
and the arrows dipped in venom! You worship them, too,
Moloch and Javeh of your Old Testament,
requiring sacrifice of blood, revenging
all save their chosen! You vouchsafe no pity
to the alien, and I'll give none. I have been a princess,
and I remember that gladly now. I come
of a race that can go mad and strike! Why, yes,
you fear me, and you should! Your pallid lips
and pallid hands and hearts, your milky hearts
that know neither love nor hate, your weasel warren
that squeaks and clusters! What could there be between us,
between the eagle and the rat, save death—?
and we've bred together—it sickens me—we've bred—
and I've been brought to bed of you! Your lips

were on my mouth! Your rodent flesh on mine,
in rodent ecstacy! I'll tear you out
from my breast, tear my breast down to bone and hard
till that shame's gone from my people!

[DURIAN *comes in doubtfully from the porch, looking for* OPARRE.]

Durian. Mother.

Oparre. Yes.

Durian. Mother,
The sun's gone down.

Oparre. Yes, it's gone down. You, too,
your hands and eyes were made of this, my shame,
a mingling with my enemy. Your lips
speak of him, silent; you are my love and hate
at war, incarnate. Take counsel! Never look
like him if you would live!

[*She kneels beside* DURIAN]

I frighten you,
my bird, your little heart beats fast. You've played
late in the sun. You're weary. Oh, God, if you
were lost, as he's lost to me! Keep me from that
you pitiless gods.

[*She rises.*]

We'll sleep on the ship tonight,
and be gone tomorrow.—Over this house the light
darken, the fogs draw down, the evil of graves
seep and flood on you till you know the hell

I walk through living, walk toward when I die,
and will not leave me now!

[NATHANIEL *turns suddenly and goes out.*]

Gazers and fools—
you have seen an end as of mountains torn asunder
to bleed in fire, and still you stand and gape,
witless—with your white witless faces! Go out!
Leave us alone!

[*She sinks to her knees sobbing, her arms round* DURIAN; *the others turn to go.*]

CURTAIN

THE WINGLESS VICTORY

ACT THREE

ACT THREE

Scene I

Scene: *A cabin in "The Wingless Victory" which opens into an inner room beyond. It is small and groined with heavy timbers, the wall to the stage right curving to conform to the side of the vessel. At the left a door opens into a central passage-way. There are two port holes in the wall at the right. A small table is built in at the right rear, and there are a few dishes on it, as if for a simple meal. There is a bench along the right wall and a couple of sturdy stools. At the rear and to the left of the entrance to the inner cabin a dark tapestry has been hung, its folds half-revealing the image of a pagan god, embroidered in dull crimson.*

Under the tapestry Toala *lies prone as if felled by a blow, her eyes fixed fearfully on* Oparre. Oparre *kneels in the center of the cabin, her forehead almost to the planking, her hair streaming down, her Malay dress ripped from one shoulder and torn. She holds a dagger in one nerveless hand and her body shakes with sobs.* Toala *begins to crawl slowly toward her. When she has almost reached the dagger* Oparre *rises suddenly, looks down at* Toala, *who presses her head to the ground.*

Toala. Princess Oparre, give me the little dagger.

Oparre.

[*Dully*]

Why—should I give you the dagger?

Toala. Because it's not safe.

Oparre. What has happened? What have I done?

Toala. You have been in a great fury, Princess, and torn your hair, and hung the tapestry of the old god. There was darkness in your eyes. I looked behind your eyes and saw only darkness.

Oparre. I have been mad.

Toala. Yes, Princess.

Oparre. Why was I mad? What have I said?

Toala. Dear Princess, give me the dagger.

Oparre. I have forgotten—I have forgotten—Yes—

[*She pauses*]

Aye—aye—aye! Oh, now I remember—!
and now it comes again!—Oh, pity me, save me—
whatever gods there are—it comes in a fall
of fire—I cannot turn but I face it—see—
a desert without shadow—only sun
scalding in fire! I shall go mad again—
take this and keep it from me!

[*She throws the dagger to a far corner.*]

Let me be mad
and not remember! I cannot bear this thing
he has laid on me. When a woman has a child
the pain comes—and then goes—but this never goes,
never leaves me! I must eat death—I must—
I must die—for he never loved me! Never! Ah, yes,

but not now! Not while I live—not while he lives—
and again, again, the flame!—

[TOALA *picks up the dagger.*]

Have I hurt them?

Toala. No.

Oparre. Why was this body gathered out of dust
and bitten to my image? Let that day be evil
when a lover took a lover to mould the face
that stares up blind from my agony! Stares up
and cries, and will not be still! Let all women born
take a man's love with laughter, and leave it; take
the coil of animals they give, and rise
in mockery. And you dark peoples of the earth,
cling to your dark, lie down and feed and sleep
till you are earth again; but if you love,
love only children of the dark—keep back
from the bright hair and white hands, for they are light
and cruel, like the gods', and the love that breeds
between us is honeyed poison. Let no flesh
of theirs touch flesh of yours; where they have touched
the welt rots inward! They are unclean, unclean
and leprous to us! To lie with them is sweet,
but sweet with death! I bear that death in me
in a burning tide that rises—choking—Oh, God—
torture me no more!

Toala. You must sleep, dear Princess.
You must have some rest.

Oparre. Has he come here?

Toala. No.
There's been no one.

Oparre. He will not come. I waited
till the wave broke. I heard a wind in the rigging,
and a clock struck in blackness, and the babes
went supperless to bed. I knew it then—
he would not come—the wind was alive with whips
and my eyes were blind.—The children must be fed.
I'm here now.

Toala. Yes.

Oparre. And we must wake and feed them
that they may live, after I am dead, live out
their lives in the brothels of the East—the place
prepared for half-breeds. Take between their knees
the sewage of old oriental kingdoms
for a little silver. Smiling among the bells,
quick with disease, till they too die, and make
an end of all our love. Why should I live,
or they, when life comes down to a candle-end
to light our crawling? Where is the little knife?
I want it back!

Toala. No, no!

Oparre. Would you have us live?

Toala. Yes, Princess.

Oparre. What god do you worship, Toala?

Toala. Forgive me,
I worship the old god.

Oparre. Then, in the temples
of the old god, what is found fitting for her
who leaves her father's house against his will
to lie with an alien?—Say it.

Toala.

[*Whispering*]

She must die.

Oparre. And for her children—in the old god's temples,
what is found fitting for them?

Toala. Yes, they too.
Yes—and the children's slave!

Oparre. When we first came
from the Celebes you brought a little phial
of water hemlock, and you have it still.
Why did you bring it?

Toala. Because I knew I must die!
Because I knew then I must die! Not you—
not you, Princess Oparre!

Oparre. You brought it for me—
foreseeing all these things. Is it not so?

Toala. The men of the West have not been true, dear Princess.
They are not true to us.

Oparre. You brought it for me!

Toala. Yes, Princess.

Oparre. Why, yes, you knew it,
and I should have known. The laws of the ancient god
will be found best in the end. Why then the pain
goes from my heart, and all the dread is gone—
if I may die! You have been my slave, but now
we are two women of one race, and you
have been the wiser. Choose, then, what you will have—
but, as for me and my unwanted babes,
give us to drink of this darkness you have carried
so far for us.—We have borne names too long
across the face of earth, but we shall sleep
and turn back to nameless ground.

[TOALA *kneels and touches her forehead to* OPARRE'S *sandal.*]

Quick, then—the fire
mounts up in me; quick, lest I should see the sun
of another morning! Lest I should see his face—!
Lest still I should remember—him—

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Scene II

Scene: *The ship's cabin, later the same evening.* Toala *sits on the bench, holding the sleeping infant in her arms, rocking gently.* Oparre *cradles* Durian *on her knee, singing her asleep.*

Oparre.

[*Singing*]

Golden eyes, sombre eyes,
Sleep, now sleep;
The sun is drowned
Where the sea is deep.
The sea is deep
Where the sun is drowned.
Darksome eyes, golden eyes,
Sleep, sleep sound.

Heavy eyes, laden eyes,
Sleep with me;
The moon is shattered
Into the sea;
The sea is shattered
Under the moon.
Darkling eyes, laden eyes,
Sleep, sleep soon.

When we have first conceived to bear a child
still there's a whisper in the blood, a fear
lest some swart ancient strain look back at us

from opening eyes. But yours were golden eyes
trembling toward amber, and the little one's
shadowed, but sweet and grave. This was happiness.
The little dancing body, delicate
to run the wind, to set a foot on moon-glade
and leave no print—to bear his pointed ears
and sweet blunt hands, but with a grace your own—
how the hard sobs come strangling round my heart,
watching your morning! This was happiness.
In a sea of agony, where one surge follows
after another, to beat us down before
there's a chance to rise, in a sea of fire, where waves
of fire wash over me, I must know that, must still
know we were happy once, and he gave us that
as he gives us torment now! Oh, stubby fingers,
dearer than my own eyes that see them, dearer
because they are like his, he wants us no more,
and we must go! Oh, web of beauty, woven
of his delight, woven in mystery, worn
so proudly, he puts you off, discards you now,
still warm with him. Now to retrace our steps
while the oceaned agony follows, washing down
the sands in fire! Now to go on alone—
now to go on alone. Does she sleep, too?

Toala. Yes.

Oparre. Then we'll lay them down. For the last time.
And we'll lie down, as if to sleep.

Toala. Yes, Princess.

Oparre. Why is it I'm not weeping? I'm wept out
and can weep no more.

[*They carry the* CHILDREN *into the inner cabin. After a moment there is a knock at the passage-door.* OPARRE *comes out from the cabin.*]

Yes?

Ruel.

[*Outside*]

It's Ruel, Oparre.
Could I see you a moment?

Oparre. Yes.

[*The door opens.* RUEL *enters.* HAPPY PENNY *stands behind him.*]

Ruel. If we're not wanted
tell us at once, and we'll go. But it's no night
to sleep, we found, and finally we came,
because we'd been walking up and down so long
cursing—

Oparre. I'm a trouble to you—

Ruel. No—
not you—the pack of fiends that drives you, maybe—
and then this luck to fall on you—at this moment—
I tell you we've been cursing—well, we have—
we've cursed the earth black and blind—but there's
nothing to do—

Oparre. Nothing—

Ruel. And almost saved you—Penny here—
almost, but they'd found the diary, and the log—
and laid their plans—

Oparre. It doesn't matter now,
but thank you.

Ruel. No, it doesn't matter now.
Now that it's done.—There's an offer I could make.
I came to make it. Now that we're here I think
it does no good. Where will you go?

Oparre. But that
is what we men and women never know
of our tomorrow, whither we'll go, what winds
will blow across what water.

Ruel. You'll go to your father.

Oparre. No.—

[*A pause.*]

Ruel. If you'd accept what's left of a life,
mine's yours for the taking. It's been small good to me
or any one. I've never had a worship
till now when I've worshipped you. What help I am
or could be—I offer you that.

Oparre. What use could I make
of a life?

Ruel. You'll be alone.

Oparre. All life's too long
when you live after death. Lest I should hurt you, I thank you.
Be happy elsewhere.

Ruel. I tell you I won't have this!

Oparre. Yes, but you will. Such things are borne. Such things
as you have never dreamed are borne. Become
a custom, meaningless. This stake through my heart,
I've worn it till it gives no pain. So long
pain has no meaning. I have seen the jugglers
walk through fire. It's nothing.

Ruel. You have no place to go.

Oparre. No. But I go.
You can't help me.

Ruel. Good night.

Oparre. Good night.

[RUEL *and* PENNY *turn and go out, closing the door.* OPARRE *kneels under the tapestry.*]

The earth rolls toward the dark,
and men begin to sleep. God of the children,
god of the lesser children of the earth,
the black, the unclean, the vengeful, you are mine
now as when I was a child. He came too soon,
this Christ of peace. Men are not ready yet.
Another hundred thousand years they must drink

your potion of tears and blood. I kneel and adore you,
having blood on my hands, having found it best
that evil be given for evil. Receive me now,
one who might once have been a queen, but followed
after a soft new dynasty of gods
that were not mine. I am punished, and must die.
I ask not that my death be easy, no,
for the pain quickens in me like a loved birth
and drowns another pain, too sharp, too sharp
for woman born of women, loving men
as they must love, too well. Let it climb and burn,
this pain, till I forget he was, slip down
the night, a black among blacks, your worshipper,
and unremembering. Being gone from him
I wish no heaven or hell, but only earth
that cannot be hurt again—blind earth, blind dark,
blind water running to silence. This is a prayer
from one who is not, made to an ancient god
who will die as I am dying, when the earth
has passed him and goes on.

[*She bows her head. The door of the passage opens and* NATHANIEL *enters. She looks up, then stands.*]

Why have you come here?

Nathaniel. I find—I must go with you.

Oparre. Some hours ago
it was too late for that. It's too late now.

Nathaniel. Be bitter as you like. If you have words
that cut and tear, loose them on me. I know

what hell you've faced here, for I faced it too
walking alone.—I was mad—to think a parting
could ever part us.—

Oparre. And did you dream a meeting
could bring us together now?

Nathaniel. They may have it all,
ship, goods and money—whatever we brought with us,
may it prosper them—because I've nothing left
if I let you go.—A man must keep something within
or it's no use living—

Oparre. Have you found that, too?

Nathaniel. Aye—it's your victory—take it—if I wanted
to live
without you, it can't be done.—I know it now,
and you know it.—

Oparre. Because you love me?

Nathaniel. Because your love
and what we'd been together, and all the old days
came tearing at me, and wouldn't let me alone.—
Where you might go, what might happen to you—or
the children—
out there in the East! Come, put your arms round me,
Oparre,—
say it can be forgotten! All I ask now
is rest from what I've done!

Oparre. We ask for rest,
and sometimes find it in the end. Not here.
Not now.

Nathaniel. For God's sake be kind. I've suffered, too—
and I'll be patient, I swear I will—I've learned
that I must be patient—only be kind tonight—
don't shrink from me.—Do you see that I've come back,
and it's to be as it was?

Oparre. To be as it was.

Nathaniel. Aye, girl, all as it was. One touch of your hand
and I'll be healed.

Oparre. Though you should love forever,
and stand before me, pleading, though I should love you,
and have this love to offer, not once, forever,
will you touch my hand again.

Nathaniel. It's only your anger
makes you say it, Oparre.

Oparre. Not once, forever,
not till the tides of suns, in the infinite years,
wash my reluctant earth by chance to drift
toward earth that hung on you. We are parted. Take
that word for an end.

Nathaniel. But you love me.

Oparre. You've been ashamed
to call me yours—ashamed to say "she's mine"
in any company—and I'm ashamed
to say that you were mine, and my dark body

remembers you. I hold you free of blame.
You're but one of a colorless tribe, a tribe that's said:
those who are black are slaves, to be driven, slept with,
beaten, sent on, never loved. Beyond law, we are,
reptilian, to be trodden. You I forgive,
but not your tribe or race—or the white of your hands;
the insult I have had the blood in me
will not forgive.—It will be no man's slave,
nor will my daughters!

Nathaniel. I swear it—I swear it, Oparre—

Oparre. And though you swear till the night come down in fire
to vouch your word, you are not believed, and my blood,
my dark blood, richer and prouder than your own,
will pour on the ground before I stretch a hand
to the race you drew from. We are less than you.
You part the earth among you, burdening us
with your labor and your lust. Among yourselves
you think to breed and rule, breed up in men
a race of kings to climb through the centuries
on us who bear you. But your veins turn pale;
your pride is the pride of merchants, crawling; your anger—
your very anger's afraid of death, and crawls
lest you should die. You will need us then, your race
of kings will breed water-thin in the after-time
for lack of what we could lend you—fire at the heart,
the word that goes with the hand, a dignity

savage, imperial, choosing rather to die
than live unwanted.

Nathaniel. There's no home left for you
in the Celebes. You'll come there a woman, helpless,
among the Eastern traders —

Oparre. Have you known me helpless
save where I gave my love? But that's gone now,
and I meet my world alone.

Nathaniel. I came prepared
to face this sentence with you. If you won't have it
there's nothing I can offer. But think, Oparre,
we have been happy, and could be.

Oparre. It's burned out.
Only you and yours will cling to a tawdry end
of remembered love, till it's down to rags and habits
hung on your hate.

Nathaniel. Where are the children?

Oparre. Asleep.

Nathaniel. I must see them a moment.

[*He steps toward the cabin.*]

Oparre. No.

Nathaniel. I won't wake them.

Oparre. No!
They're not yours now!

Nathaniel. I shall see them if I like.

Oparre. As you value happiness, and what was ours
and what may yet be yours—say your farewell
to me and quickly, and go!

Nathaniel. I shall see them, though.

[*He goes into the inner cabin.* OPARRE *walks unsteadily across the cabin as if in a dream, and sinks suddenly beside the bench, her head fallen on her arm.* NATHANIEL *re-enters.*]

Oparre! Toala's dead on the floor! The children—
I can feel no heart-beat—! Oparre! Oparre!

Oparre. I know.
There's a black hemlock grows in the Celebes
for which we know no antidote.

Nathaniel. Damn you! What right
had you to kill the children?

Oparre. They're not wanted.
The white men of the East would have made them
whores.
It is not fitting the daughters of a queen
should be whores or slaves. We drank of it together.

Nathaniel. You drank it?

Oparre. Would I let them go alone?
All that was once between us is erased
and has not been, will not be remembered, leaves
no shadow.

Nathaniel. This is your revenge, a fiend's
revenge! It's as well you die! A fiend out of hell
could do no worse.

Oparre. I wanted you—never to know.
Then we'd have gone into silence, and left you free.
I never wanted you to know, oh, truly.
The error has been mine. I loved you enough—
to leave you.

Nathaniel. God forgive me if I love you—
even dying—while they lie dead—

Oparre. Oh, Durian, Durian—
and my babe—not to see you—it will soon be dark—

Nathaniel. Is there nothing to do? Quick, tell me?

Oparre. Nothing. But only
if you would put your hand against my lips.
[*She stares up blindly.*]
It was all lies I said. I loved you and died
because I loved you. Is any death found better
than to give your life for your love? Oh, quick, your
hand
on my lips.

Nathaniel.
[*Kneeling*] [*His arms round her*]
I murdered you.

Oparre. My sweet, my sweet—
as it was by the coral edge—in the Indian sea—
the black wave—out of night—

[*Her head droops forward. The door suddenly opens and* RUEL *enters.*]

Ruel. I'm sorry—I heard
someone cry out.

Nathaniel. Come in. Oparre's dead—

[*He rises.*]

and the children.

Ruel. God! I knew it.

Nathaniel. Will you do this for me—?
Say nothing of this—the ship will sail tomorrow,
and I go with it.

Ruel. I'll go too, then.

Nathaniel. Yes?

Ruel. I've had enough of my native town.

Nathaniel. I go
to be with her while I can. What I've left of life
I shall know what it is to love one dead,
and seek her and not find. Let the sands of years
sift quickly and wash long. I shall have no rest
till my dust lies down with hers.

CURTAIN

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